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A N N E H E R E F O R D.



VOL. II.

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ANNE HEREFORD.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF

“EAST LYNNE,” “THE RED COURT FARM,”
ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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ANNE HEREFORD.

CHAPTER I.

CHANDOS.

THE station of Hetton, some fifty miles' journey from London on the Great Western Line, and two from Chandos, lay hot and bright in the September sun. It was afternoon when we reached it. Madame de Mellissie had preferred to stay a night in London, and go on the next day at leisure. A handsome close carriage was in waiting outside the station, its three attendants wearing the Chandos livery, its panels bearing the arms of the Chandos family, surmounted by the badge of England's baronetage, the bloody hand. The servants lifted their hands to their hats, and respectfully welcomed Madame de Mellissie.

“ Is mamma well ?” she inquired of them.

“ Quite well, madam.”

“ And my brother ? Why is he not here ?”

“ Mr. Chandos, madam, was obliged to attend a county meeting.”

“ Those ponderous county meetings !” she retorted. “ And they never do any good. Step in, Miss Hereford.”

We were soon driving along. Pauline sat behind with one of the footmen, the other remained to bring on the luggage. Madame de Mellissie looked out on the points of road as we passed, with all the glee of a child.

“ This is my second visit only to Chandos since my marriage. For two years mamma was implacable, and would not see me ; but last year she relented, and I came here for a little while. I don’t believe, though, mamma will ever forgive me in her heart. I am sorry for it now.”

“ Sorry for having—having married as you did ?”

“ Ay, I am. Those rebellious marriages never bring luck. They can’t, you know ; only, girls are so thoughtless and stupid. I made my own bed, and must lie on it : it is not so bad as it

might have been : but—of course, all that's left is to make the best of it. Alfred says we should get on better if we had children. I say we should not. And there, in the distance, you see the chimneys of Chandos. Look, Anne!"

She was wayward in her moods ; wayward to me as to others. Sometimes, during our past journey, she would be distantly polite, calling me "Miss Hereford :" the next moment open and cordial as ever she had been at school. That she had thrown herself away in a worldly point of view, marrying as she did, was indisputable, and Emily Chandos was not one to forget it.

Chandos was a long, low, red brick house, with gables and turrets to its two end wings, and a small turret in the middle, which gave it a somewhat gothic appearance. It was but two stories high, and struck me as looking low, not elevated, perhaps partly from its length. No steps ascended to the house, the lower rooms were on a level with the ground outside. It was a sort of double house ; the servants' rooms, kitchens, and chambers, all looking to the back, where there was a separate entrance. Extensive

grounds lay around it, but they were so crowded with trees, except just close to the house, as to impart a weird-like, gloomy appearance; they completely shut Chandos House from the view of the world beyond, and the beyond world from the view of Chandos. A pretty trellised portico was at the entrance; jessamine, roses, and clematis entwined themselves round it, extending even to the windows on either hand. Before the carriage had well stopped, a gentleman rode up on horse-back, followed by a groom. He threw himself from his horse, and came to the carriage-door.

“Back just in time to receive you, Emily. How are you, my dear?”

She jumped lightly from the carriage, and he was turning away with her when he saw me. His look of intense surprise was curious to behold, and he stopped in hesitation. Emily spoke: her tone a slighting one, almost disparaging.

“It is only my companion. Would you believe it, Harry, Alfred took a prudent fit, and would not suffer me to travel alone? So I engaged Miss Hereford: she was in quest of a situation; and we knew each other in days gone by.”

He assisted me from the carriage. It was the same fine man I had seen some years before at Mademoiselle Barlieu's; the same pale countenance, with its delicate features and rather sad expression; the same sweet voice. He then gave his arm to his sister, and I followed them to the sitting-room. They called it the oak parlour; a large, square room, somewhat dark, its colours harmoniously blending, and its windows shaded with the trained clematis and jessamine. It was the favourite sitting-room at Chandos. Other reception-rooms there were: a gorgeous double drawing-room, a well-stored library, a spacious dining-room; but the oak parlour was the favourite. And none could wonder at it; for it was just one of those seductive apartments that speak to the feelings of repose.

“Where's mamma?” exclaimed Emily, as we entered.

“Not far; she will be here directly, you may be sure,” replied Mr. Chandos. “Is this your first visit to our part of the country, Miss Hereford?”

“ Yes ; I never was here before.”

Now what was there in this reply to offend Madame de Mellissie ? or did she resent his speaking to me at all ? She turned round, haughty pride stamped on every line of her countenance, rebuke on her tongue : though the rebuke lay in the tone, rather than in the words.

“ Miss Hereford ! the gentleman to whom you speak is Mr. Chandos.”

Had I again omitted the sign of my dependent situation, the “ sir ” ? I, who had resolved, with my then burning face (burning again now), never so to offend for the future,—I supposed that that was the meaning of Madame de Mellissie ; I suppose so still, to this hour. I had spoken as though I were the equal of Mr. Chandos : I must not—I *would* not—so offend again.

“ Emily, my love, you are welcome.”

A little woman had entered the room, and was holding Madame de Mellissie in her arms. It was Lady Chandos. She wore a small and pretty widow’s cap of net, a rich but soft black silk dress, and black lace mittens. Her nose

was sharp, and her small face had a permanent redness, the result of disturbed health. She was not like her daughter, not half so beautiful ; and she was not like her handsome son, unless it was in the subdued, sad expression. She quite started back when her eyes fell on me, evidently not prepared to see a stranger.

“ Miss Hereford, mamma ; a young lady whom I have engaged as companion. Alfred would not suffer me to travel alone.”

Lady Chandos turned to me with a pleasant smile, but it struck me as being a forced one.

“ I think you look more fit to take care of Miss Hereford, Emily, than Miss Hereford of you,” she said.

“ I am the elder by some two or three years, if you mean that, mamma. Oh ! it was just a whim of my husband’s.”

More questioning on either side ; just the information sought for when relatives meet after a long absence. Emily answered carelessly and lightly ; and I sat behind unnoticed.

Hill was called. Hill was still at Chandos, lady’s maid and housekeeper, a confidential

servant. She came forward, wearing a dark brown gown and handsome black silk apron, her grey hair banded under her close white lace cap. Lady Chandos spoke with her in an under-tone, most likely consulting what chamber I should be placed in, for Hill turned her eyes upon me and looked cross.

A wide staircase, its balustrades of carved oak, gilded in places, wound up to the rooms above. A gallery, lighted from above, ran along this upper floor, from wing to wing, paintings lining it. It seemed as if the wings had some time been added to the house, for they were of a different style of architecture. A green-baize door shut them out from the gallery. Beyond this was a narrow corridor, and then a double door of stout oak, which formed the real entrance to the wings, the same on both sides. What rooms might be within them, I did not yet know. Each wing had a staircase of communication between its upper and lower floors, and also a small door of egress to the grounds on the sides of the house, where the trees grew very thick. In the east wing (the house, you must under-

stand, facing the south) this lower outer door was kept locked and barred—to all intents and purposes, closed up; in the west wing, which was inhabited exclusively by Lady Chandos, the door was simply locked, and could be opened inside at will; though no one ever made use of it but herself, and she very rarely.

Several rooms opened from the gallery to the front—all of them bed-chambers, except one: that was the library. The library was the room next to the *east* wing. Opposite to it was a door opening to a room that looked back, level with the north rooms in the east wing. A similar room opened from the gallery at the other end. In fact, the house was built in uniform—one end the same as the other. Between the doors of these two rooms the wall of the gallery ran unbroken; there was, in fact, no communication whatever, as regards the upper rooms, between the back portion of the house and the front.

And now for the ground-floor. The portico was not in the middle of the house, but near to the east wing; one room only, the large dining-

room, that seemed to be never used, lying between. The hall was rather small, dark, and shut in, the oak-parlour being on the left hand as you entered. Two doors at the back of the hall led, the one to the handsome staircase, the other to the kitchens and other domestic rooms belonging to the household. A spacious corridor, underneath the gallery above, branched off from the hall by means of an open archway behind the oak-parlour, and ran along the house; and the various reception-rooms, all looking front, including Mr. Chandos's private sitting-room, opened from it. A passage at the other end of the corridor led to the rooms at the back, but it had been closed up; and there was no communication whatever on this lower floor with the wings. The doors in the hall, leading to the stairs and to the servants' offices, as often as not stood open during the day. Lady Chandos sat much in the west wing; she seemed to like being alone. And I think that is all that need be said at present in regard to the in-door features of the house. The description has not been given unnecessarily.

Hill marshalled me up the staircase. It had been decided that I was to have the “blue room.” The stairs terminated in a wide landing. The library and the east wing lay to the right, as we ascended; the long gallery on the left. Hill passed two chamber-doors, and opened a third, that of the blue room. It was as little calculated for immediate occupation as any room can well be; the whole of the furniture being covered up with clean sheets of linen, except the blue silk window-hangings. Madame de Mellissie had the room next to it, and I could hear her talking in it with her mother. Hill surveyed matters, and gave a sort of grunt.

“Ugh! I thought the maids had uncovered this room yesterday: as I’ve just told my lady. They must have hurried over their cleaning pretty quick. Please to step this way, miss. If you’ll wait here a few minutes, I’ll have things arranged.”

She went back along the gallery, opened the door of the first bed-room on this side the staircase, and showed me in. It was a very pretty room, not large; its hangings and cur-

tains of delicate chintz, lined with pale rose-colour, and its furniture *not* covered up, but as evidently not in occupation. I wondered why they could not put me in that. The window was wide open. I untied my bonnet and stood there, Hill closing the door and going down stairs, no doubt to call up the housemaids.

With the exception of the gravel drive below, and the green lawn in front of it, its velvet softness dotted with the brightest flowers, the place seemed to look upon nothing but trees, intersected with gloomy walks. Trees of all sorts—low as dwarf shrubs, high as towering poplars, dark green, light green, bright green. The walks branched everywhere—one in particular, just opposite my window, looked very gloomy, shaded as it was by dark pine-trees. I found afterwards that it was called the Pine Walk. Why the place should have struck upon me with a gloom, I can hardly tell; other people might have seen nothing to justify the impression. “Chandos has need to live in a world of its own,” I thought, “for assuredly it is shut in from all view of the outer world.”

There arose a sound as of some one softly whistling. It came from the adjacent window, one in the gallery, which must have been open the same as mine. I did not like to lean forward and look. Another moment, and the whistling ceased; some one else appeared to have come up, and voices in conversation supervened. They were those of Lady Chandos and her son, and I became an involuntary hearer of what troubled me much.

“This is one of Emily’s wild actions,” said Lady Chandos. “She knows quite enough of our unhappy secrets to be sure that a stranger is not wanted at Chandos.”

“Look for the most improbable thing in the world, mother, before you look for discretion or thought in Emily,” was the reply of Mr. Chandos. “But this is but a young girl, unsuspicuous naturally from her age and sex: Emily might have introduced a more dangerous inmate. And it may happen that——”

“I know what you would urge, Harry,” interrupted the voice of Lady Chandos. “But there’s no certainty. There cannot be: and it is

most unfortunate that Emily should have brought her here. Every night, night by night as they come round, I lie awake shivering ; if the wind does but move the trees, I start ; if an owl shrieks forth its dreary note, I almost shriek with it. You know what we have cause to fear. And for a stranger to be sleeping in the house !”

“ Yes, it is certainly unfortunate.”

“ It is more than that ; it is dangerous. Harry, I have never, I hope, done a discourteous thing, but it did occur to me to put this young girl to sleep on the servants’ side of the house. I think her being so ladylike in appearance saved her from it, not my good manners. I don’t know what to be at.”

Mr. Chandos made no reply.

“ I wish I had done it !” resumed Lady Chandos. “ But there’s another thing—Emily might object : and to have any fuss would be worse than all. Still, look at the risk—the stake ! Is it too late, do you think, Harry ? Would it do to change her room now ?”

“ My dear mother, you are the best judge,”

observed Mr. Chandos. "I should not change the room if I could possibly avoid it; the young lady might consider it in the light of an indig-nity. Emily introduced her in a slighting sort of manner; but her looks are refined, her man-ners those of a gentlewoman."

"Yes, that's true."

"How long does Emily think of remaining?"

"She says two weeks. But she is uncertain as the wind. How *could* she think of bringing a stranger?"

"Have you told her all?—why it is just now particularly undesirable?"

"No. She never has been told. And I hope and trust she may be gone again before—before trouble comes."

"Quite right; I should not tell her. Well, mother, as you ask my opinion, I say things had better remain as arranged; let the young lady occupy the blue room. How cross Hill looked over it!"

"Not without cause. I cannot think how Emily can have been so senseless. It is just as if she had planned the annoyance—bringing her

here without writing ! Had she written, I should have forbidden it."

" Let us hope that nothing will happen."

" Harry, we cannot answer for it. Again, on Ethel's account a stranger in the house is not desirable. Emily might have thought of that."

The voices ceased ; I suppose the speakers quitted the place ; and down I sat, overwhelmed with shame and consternation. To be introduced in this unwelcome manner into a house, bringing annoyance and discomfort to its inmates, seemed to me little less than a crime ; I could scarcely have felt more guilty had I committed one.

And what was the mystery ? That something or other was amiss in the family was all too evident. " Have they got a ghost here ?" I said to myself in peevishness. Involuntarily the long-past words of Annette Barlieu flashed into my mind : and I had never thought of them since they were spoken. " There is always a cloud hanging over Chandos. They do not care to have a governess residing there : Miladi said it to me." Then what was the cloud ?—what was the fear ?

Hill came in again, saying I was to keep the chintz-room. Lady Chandos, in passing just now along the gallery to her own apartments in the west wing, saw for the first time that the blue room was not ready. So it was decided between her and Hill that I should occupy the chintz one.

The luggage was brought up, and I began to dress for dinner. A question occurred to me—are companions expected to dress, in the wide sense of the term? I really did not know, in my inexperience. My birth entitled me to do so; but did my position? A minute's hesitation told me I was a guest at Chandos, treated and regarded as one, and might appear accordingly. So I put on a pretty low blue silk, with my necklace of real pearls, that had once been mamma's, and the pale blue enamelled bracelets with the pearl clasps. I had been obliged to dress a good deal at Mrs. Paler's in the evening; and—to confess the truth—I liked it.

I stood at the door, hesitating whether to go down, as one is apt to do in a house, the ways of which are unfamiliar, when Mr. Chandos, ready

for dinner, came suddenly out of the room opposite to the library, nearly opposite to mine, the one that I spoke of as looking to the back of the house, and adjoining the back rooms of the east wing. I concluded that it was his bed-chamber. He smiled at me as he crossed to the stairs, but did not say anything. Directly after, Emily de Mellissie appeared in the gallery, radiant in white silk, with an apple-blush rose in her hair, and a diamond aigrette embedded in it. They said she was full of whims—as I knew for myself. How ardently I hoped that some whim would send her speedily away from Chandos !

We went into the first drawing-room, one of the most beautiful rooms I had ever seen, its fittings violet and gold. Lady Chandos was there, and did not appear to have changed her dress. The dinner was served in the oak-parlour; not once in a year did they use the great dining-room. Lady Chandos kindly passed her arm through mine, and Mr. Chandos brought in his sister.

It was a pleasant dinner, and a pleasant even-

ing. Emily was on her best behaviour, telling all manner of amusing anecdotes of Paris life to her mother and brother, ignoring me. I listened, and was spoken to by the others now and then. We did not quit the oak-parlour. When dessert was taken, Hickens, the butler, removed it and brought in tea. "After my snug sitting-room up-stairs, the drawing-room is so large," observed Lady Chandos to me, as if in apology; "I like this parlour best."

Upon retiring to rest, a neat-looking servant with light hair, whose name I found was Harriet, came to the chintz-room, and asked whether she should do anything for me. She said she was one of the housemaids—there were two besides herself, Lizzy Dene and Emma. Altogether, including the coachman, a helper in the stables, and two gardeners—all four of whom were out of doors, living half a mile away—there were seventeen servants at Chandos. A large number, as it seemed to me, considering the very little attendance that was required of them. I told Harriet I had been accustomed to wait upon myself, and she retired.

But I could not get to sleep. The conversation I had overheard kept haunting me. I wondered what the mystery could be; I wondered whether I should be disturbed in the night by noises, or else. What uncanny doings could there be in the house?—what unseemly inmates, rendering it inexpedient that a stranger should share its hospitality? Was it really tenanted by ghosts?—or by something worse? At any rate, they did not molest me, and my sleep at last was tranquil.

We went down the following morning at half-past eight; Emily in a white dimity robe of no shape, but tied round the waist with a scarlet cord, the effect altogether rather untidy; I in a mauve-coloured muslin, with ribbons of the same shade; and found Lady and Mr. Chandos waiting breakfast in the oak-parlour. The panels of this room were of alternate white and carved oak, with a great deal of gilding about both; it had a most unusual appearance; I had never seen anything like it before. The ceiling was white, with gilt scrolls round it, and cornices. The large chimney-glass was in a carved oak frame,

gilded in places to match the walls ; the slanting girandole opposite the window, reflecting the green grass and the waving trees in its convex mirrored surface, had a similar frame. The chandelier for the wax lights was of gilt, also the branches on the mantelpiece, and those of the girandole. It was a pleasant room to enter —as I thought that morning. The oak-brown silk curtains, with their golden satin-wrought flowers, were drawn quite back from the windows, which were thrown open to the lovely morning air ; a bright fire burnt in the grate opposite the door ; the breakfast-table with its snow-white linen, its painted Worcester china, and its glittering silver, was in the middle. Easy-chairs stood about the room, a sofa against the wall—all covered to match the curtains—brown and gold : a piano was there, a sideboard stood at the back, underneath the reflective mirror ; other chairs, tables, ornaments ; and the dark carpet was soft as the softest moss. Out of all order though cavillers for severe taste might have called the room, I know that it had an indescribable charm.

Lady Chandos, dressed just as she had been the previous day—and I found it was her usual dress at all times—sat with her back to the window, her son facing her, I and Emily on either side. Breakfast was about half over when Hickens brought in some letters on a small silver waiter, presenting them to Mr. Chandos. I was soon to learn that all letters coming to the house, whether for servants or else, were invariably handed first of all to Mr. Chandos. One of these was directed to “Lady Chandos;” two to “Harry Chandos, Esquire;” the fourth to “Mrs. Chandos.” Mr. Chandos put his mother’s letter on the waiter again, and Hickens handed it to her. He then came back with the waiter to his master, who placed the other letter upon it.

“For Mrs. Chandos.” And Hickens went out with it.

Who was Mrs. Chandos? I should have liked to ask, but dared not.

“Do you mean to say that there is no letter for me, Harry?” exclaimed Madame de Mellissie. “That’s my punctual husband! He said he

should be quite certain to send me a letter to-day."

"The French letters often come in later, Emily," remarked her brother.

He and Lady Chandos read their letters, Emily talked and laughed, and the meal came to an end. At its conclusion Mr. Chandos offered to go round the grounds with his sister.

"Yes, I'll go," she answered. "You can go also, Miss Hereford, if you like. But we must get our bonnets and parasols first, Harry."

My bonnet and parasol were soon got, and I stood at my bed-room door, waiting for Emily. As she came down the gallery, the green-baize door on my right, leading to the east wing, opened, and a middle-aged lady appeared at it. Madame de Mellissie advanced and cordially saluted her.

"I should have paid you a visit yesterday, Mrs. Freeman, but that I heard Mrs. Chandos was ill."

"You are very kind, madam," was the lady's reply. "Mrs. Chandos was exceedingly unwell yesterday, but she is better to-day. She——"

Mrs. Freeman was interrupted. A lovely-looking girl—girl she looked, though she may have been seven or eight-and-twenty—appeared at the door of one of the rooms in the wing. Her dress was white ; she wore a beautiful little head-dress of lace and lavender ribbons, and she came forward smiling.

“ I heard you had arrived, Emily dear, and should have joined you all yesterday, but I was so poorly,” she said, clasping Madame de Mellissie’s hand. “ How well you look !”

“ And you look well also,” replied Emily. “ We must never judge you by your looks, Mrs. Chandos.”

“ No, that you must not : I always look in rude health, in spite of my ailments,” answered Mrs. Chandos. “ Will you not come and sit with me for half an hour ?”

“ Of course I will,” was Madame de Mellissie’s reply, as she untied her bonnet and threw it to me carelessly, speaking as careless words.

“ Have the goodness to tell Mr. Chandos that I am not going out yet.” Mrs. Chandos, who had not noticed me before, turned in surprise,

and looked at me ; but Madame de Mellissie did not, I suppose, deem me worth an introduction.

I went downstairs to deliver her message. Mr. Chandos was waiting in the oak-parlour, talking to his mother.

“ Madame de Mellissie has desired me to say that she will not go out yet, sir.”

“ I did not expect she would,” he answered, with a slight laugh, “ for she is changeable as the wind. Tell her so from me, will you, Miss Hereford ?”

He bent his dark blue eyes upon me with a half-saucy glance, as if intimating that he meant what he said.

“ Very well, sir.”

I returned to my own room, took off my things, and sat down to think.

Who was Mrs. Chandos ?

CHAPTER II.

OUT OF DOORS AT CHANDOS.

THAT day was a dull one. I did not feel at home, and could not make myself feel so. Madame de Mellissie went out in the carriage with Lady Chandos, and I was alone. I strolled out a little in the afternoon, just to see what the place outside was like. The gates of egress were on the left, the gravel drive leading straight to them ; but there were so many paths and walks, and trees and rocks, and banks and flower-beds on either side, that you might almost lose yourself, and quite lose sight of the broad drive. The most curious-looking feature about Chandos was the little upper turret : but for the narrow Gothic window in it, it might have been taken for a pigeon-house.

I came back, and crossed to the pine walk ; that again was intersected by paths, conducting it

was hard to say whither. The trees were towering aloft, the lower shrubs were high and thick. In three minutes after quitting the house, not a vestige even of its chimneys was to be seen ; and I retraced my steps, not caring to lose myself. But for the beautiful order in which everything was kept, the place might have been called a wilderness.

I noticed one thing : that the front windows in each of the wings had their inside shutters closed ; strong oak shutters : both the lower and the upper rooms were shut in from the light of day. I never saw them opened while I stayed at Chandos. The lower windows, looking to the sides of the house, were also kept dark ; but the rooms above and those looking to the back were open. A narrow gravel path, shut in by laurels, led round the wings to the back of the house. The servants used that by the east wing, the one inhabited by Mrs. Chandos. No one used the other, except Lady Chandos. For a servant or any one else to be seen there would have been high treason, involving probably dismissal. It was an understood law of the house, and never rebelled against. The shrubs on Lady Chandos's side

had grown thick as a very grove, affording just space for one person to pass to the small door that gave entrance to the wing. I knew nothing of the prohibition in strolling there that day. On learning it afterwards, I felt thankful not to have been seen.

I was in-doors, and sitting in my bed-chamber, the chintz-room, when the carriage returned. Emily, in high spirits, saw me as she ran up stairs, and came in.

“ All alone, Anne ! We have had a charming drive. To-morrow, if you are good, you shall have one ; we’ll take the large carriage.”

She stood with her foot on a small low chair, tilting it about, and looking out at the servants, who were turning the horses to drive round to the stables at the back.

“ What a nice place this seems to be, Madame de Mellissie ! But I think, if I were Lady Chandos, I should have the trees and shrubs thinned a little.”

“ It is mamma’s pleasure that they shall be thick. She only lives in retirement. Were my brother, Sir Thomas, to come home, he might

effect a change. As long as he is away, mamma's will is paramount at Chandos."

"How many brothers have you?"

"Two. Sir Thomas and Harry."

"Have you lost any?"

"Any brothers? A little one: Greville. He died when he was six years old. Why do you ask?"

"I was only wondering who Mrs. Chandos was. It has been crossing my mind that she is perhaps a daughter-in-law."

Madame de Mellissie turned on me a haughty face of reproof. "It certainly is no affair of yours, Miss Hereford. Mrs. Chandos is Mrs. Chandos; she is no impostor."

"I beg your pardon, madam," I meekly answered, feeling I had deserved it. What right had I, Anne Hereford, to be curious, and to show it?

It effectually silenced me for the rest of the day. We dined together; herself, Lady Chandos, and I. Mrs. Chandos I saw no more of, and Mr. Chandos was dining at Marden, a town some few miles off.

We were at breakfast the following morning, when the letters, as before, were brought in. Two or three for the servants, which Mr. Chandos returned to Hickens, one for Mr. Chandos, and one for Madame Alfred de Mellissie.

“I thought he would be writing,” Emily observed, in a tone of apathy, carelessly holding out her hand for the letter. “Though I know he hates it like poison, Frenchman like.”

“It is not your husband’s hand, Emily,” said Mr. Chandos.

“No? Why—I declare it is old Madame de Mellissie’s! What can be amiss?” she cried.

“There! was ever anything like that?” she exclaimed, glancing down the letter. “Alfred’s taken ill: his fancied gastric fever has turned into a real one. And I must go back without delay, the old mère writes.”

“Is he very ill?” inquired Lady Chandos.

“So *she* says—in danger. But she is timid and fanciful. I shall not go.”

“Will you allow me to see the letter, Emily?” asked Lady Chandos, in a grave tone.

“See it and welcome; read it out for the public benefit, if you will, mamma. Look at Harry, staring at me with his blue eyes! He deems me, no doubt, the very model of a loving wife.”

“Emily! can you have read this letter?” asked Lady Chandos.

“Yes, I’ve read it.”

“Then how can you hesitate? Your husband is in danger: he may not survive: he will not, they say, unless a change takes place. You must hasten away by the first train.”

“Mamma, you need not take the half of it for gospel. Madame de Mellissie is so wrapped up in her son, that if his finger aches she sends for a doctor, and asks whether it will mortify.”

“Child! I must recommend you to go,” was the impressive response of Lady Chandos.

“Of course I shall go; I never meant to hesitate,” came the peevish answer. “But it is excessively tiresome.”

It appeared that the letter to Mr. Chandos was also from Madame de Mellissie, asking him to urge his sister’s instant departure. She finished

her breakfast, and was leaving the room to prepare, when she saw me following.

“ I do not want you just now, Miss Hereford. Pauline will see to my things.”

“ But I have my own to pack.”

“ Your own ! What for ? Alfred de Mellissie is not your husband, that you should hasten to him.”

“ But—am I not to go with you, madam ?”

“ Certainly not,” was her emphatic answer. “ It would be a needless expense and trouble.”

I felt dumbfounded. “ But, Madame de Mellissie, what am I to do ?”

“ Do ! Why, stay here till my return. What else should you do ? I shall be back in a few days at most. I know what Monsieur Alfred’s danger is ! Only, if I did not make the journey, madame la mère would hold me forth to all Paris as a model of barbarity. Mamma,” she quickly added, turning to Lady Chandos, “ I shall return here to finish my visit as soon as I can get away. It will not be a week before you will see me again. You can let Miss Hereford wait here for me, can’t you ? Can’t you, Harry ?”

“ Provided Miss Hereford will make herself at home with us, which I fancy she has not yet done,” was the reply of Mr. Chandos, looking at me with a smile. Lady Chandos simply bowed her head.

“ Oh, she is one who always gives you the notion of being shy,” carelessly replied Emily, as she ran up the staircase.

What was I to do? I could not say to her, “ You shall take me;” but, after the conversation I had overheard, it was most unpleasant to me to stay. I ran after Emily. I told her that my remaining might not be really agreeable to Lady and Mr. Chandos. Her reply was, that they must make it agreeable, for there was no accommodation for me at Madame de Mellissie’s.

“ Look here, Anne; don’t you be shy and stupid. I cannot drop you in the street like a waif, en route, and I cannot take you home. Suppose Alfred’s illness should turn to typhus fever? would it be well for you to be there? But there’s no room for you, and that’s the fact.”

I disclosed to her my penniless condition, for some of my poor twenty-five shillings had melted

on the journey from Paris, and I had but fifteen left. I begged her to lend me some money, and I would find my way alone to Nulle. Emily laughed heartily, but she did not give me any.

“I shall be back next week, child. Make yourself easy.”

By mid-day she was gone, Pauline attending her, and Mr. Chandos escorting her to the station. I was left, with the words I had heard spoken, as to my unwelcome presence in the house, beating their refrain on my brain. Whether Lady Chandos remonstrated privately with her daughter against leaving me, or whether she recognised it as a sort of necessity, and tacitly acquiesced in the arrangement, I had no means of knowing.

What was I to do with myself? Put on my things and go out? There was nothing else to do. As I came down with them on, Lady Chandos met me in the hall.

“Are you going abroad, Miss Hereford?”

“If you have no objection, madam. But I was only going because I felt at a loss for some-

thing to occupy myself with. Perhaps you can give me something to do, Lady Chandos?"

"I cannot aid you, I believe. It is a pity Madame de Mellissie should have left you here, for I fear you will find it dull; but I suppose there was no help for it. I speak for your sake, my dear," she kindly added.

"I should be so glad to do anything for you. I can sew."

"My maids do the sewing," she said. "You will find some pleasant walks in the vicinity. There is one to the left, as you leave the gates, exceedingly rural and quiet. You will be quite safe; it is an honest neighbourhood."

I found the walk she spoke of, and stayed out for nearly two hours. Not a single house, but one, did I pass: I found afterwards that what few houses there were lay to the right. This one stood in view of the entrance gates, nearly opposite the lodge; a substantial, moderate-sized house, closed at present, and displaying a board—"To Let." I had half a mind to open its front gate and explore the garden, but I had been out long enough, and turned to Chandos.

I was not to go home without an adventure. In passing through the small iron gate, by the side of the large ones, an awfully fierce great dog sprang forward, savagely barking. Back I flew, and shut the gate between us: why he did not leap over the gate, I don't know: he stood there barking, and rattling part of a chain that was attached to his collar. Never having been brought into contact with dogs, I was terribly afraid of fierce ones, and cowered there in an agony of fear, not daring to run away, lest the angry animal should leap the gate and spring upon me.

Footsteps came behind me, and I looked round, hoping for protection. It was Mr. Chandos. He saw what was the matter, and seemed to make but one bound to the gate.

“Stay there, Miss Hereford.”

He passed quietly through, and confronted the dog; the dog confronted him, barking still.

“Nero!”

The voice allayed the angry passions, and the dog stepped up. Mr. Chandos seized the end of the chain.

“You and I must have a settling for this,

Nero. Will you come here, Miss Hereford, and I will teach him to know you, so that he does not alarm you again, should he get loose. He must have broken his chain."

"Oh, sir! Pray do not make me come near him!"

Mr. Chandos turned his face quickly towards me. "Are you afraid of dogs?"

"Rather, sir. I am of that one."

At this juncture, a groom came running up, in search of the dog. Mr. Chandos spoke sharply to him, and the man answered, in a tone of deprecation, that it was no fault of his; that the dog sometimes, in his fits of effort to get loose was as a "born devil," and in one of those fits had, a quarter of an hour before, snapped his chain, and burst through the stable window.

"He has run the fit off, then," said Mr. Chandos, "for he is quiet enough now. Take him back, and mind you secure him fast."

The man took the chain in his hand, and went off, leading the dog. Mr. Chandos opened the gate for me. I had not overcome the fright yet, and my face felt ashy pale.

“ My poor child ! It has indeed frightened you. Do you feel faint ? ”

“ I shall not faint, sir. I never fainted in my life.”

Without the least ceremony, he placed my hand within his arm, and walked on. A little to the right, underneath some thick cypress trees, there was a bench. He bade me sit down, and seated himself beside me.

“ You will be all the better for resting here a minute or two. How did it happen ? Where did you and Mr. Nero encounter each other ? ”

“ I had been out walking, sir. Lady Chandos told me of a pretty walk there is to the left, outside the gates. In coming back, I was just inside the gate, when the dog came up, leaping and barking.”

“ And you were frightened ? ”

“ Very much frightened. Had I not occasion, sir ? One moment later, and he might have torn me to pieces.”

“ It is my dog,” he resumed, “ and I am exceedingly sorry he should have given you the alarm. Will you return good for evil ? ”

“Good for evil! In what manner, sir?” I asked.

“By not mentioning this to my mother,” he replied. “She has a great dislike to dogs being kept on the premises. Some few months ago, when a friend of mine was dying, he asked me to take his dog—this one which has just frightened you—but Lady Chandos would only consent to its coming here on condition that it should be kept tied up. It is a valuable dog, though fierce on occasions, the confinement to which it is mostly condemned making it more fierce. I will take care it does not break bounds again, and I would prefer that my mother should not know of this.”

“I will not tell her, sir. I suppose Lady Chandos dislikes dogs as much as I do.”

“She does not dislike dogs: she rather likes them. But she objects—at least, she has objected latterly—to have dogs loose about the premises.”

“She fears their going mad, perhaps?”

Mr. Chandos laughed. “No, she does not fear that. I must make you and Nero friends,

Miss Hereford ; you will then find how little he is to be dreaded. You shall come to the stables with me when he is tied up fast. How long have you known my sister ?" he resumed, changing the subject.

" I knew her a little at Mademoiselle Barlieu's. I entered the school just before she left it."

" Then you must have known—have known—the circumstances under which she quitted it ?"

He had begun the sentence rapidly, as if impelled to it by impulse, but after the hesitation, continued it more slowly.

" Yes, sir. They could not be kept from the school."

" A mad act—a mad act !" he murmured : " and—if I may read signs—heartily repented of. It is, I fancy, an exemplification of the old saying, Miss Hereford, ' Marry in haste, and repent at leisure.' Poor Emily has leisure enough for it before her : she is only beginning life. I went over at the time to Mademoiselle Barlieu's."

" Yes, sir ; I saw you when you were going away, and I hid myself in a niche of the hall

while you passed. I knew you again as soon as I met you here."

" You must have a good memory for faces, then," he said, laughing.

" I think a circumstance made me recollect you, sir. It was, that your face struck upon me at Mademoiselle Barlieu's as being familiar to my memory; I felt sure that if I had not seen you before, I had seen some one very like you."

He turned round and looked at me a full minute ere he spoke.

" Who was it, Miss Hereford?"

" I cannot tell, sir. I wish I could tell. The resemblance in your face haunts me still."

" It's not much of a face to remember," he slightly said, as a stout gentleman came through the entrance-gates. He carried a roll of paper, or parchment, and was wiping his brows, his hat off.

" You look warm, Dexter," called out Mr. Chandos.

" It's a close day for autumn, sir, and I walked over," was the response of the newcomer, as he turned out of the great drive and

came up. "I'm glad to catch you at home, Mr. Chandos. I have had an offer for this house."

Mr. Chandos made room for him to sit down. "I have been turning myself into a knight-errant, Dexter; delivering a lady from the fangs of a ferocious dog."

Mr. Dexter looked as if he did not know whether to take the words in jest or earnest.

"That dog of mine got loose, and terrified this young lady nearly out of her life. I really do not know but he would have attacked her, had I not come home at the very moment. She is sitting here to gain breath and courage. About the house? which house do you mean?"

"I speak of the house opposite your lodgings, sir," resumed Mr. Dexter, after giving me a polite nod. "Haines came over to me this morning, saying a gentleman wished to take it, and required to enter immediately."

"What gentleman? Who is he?"

"Nobody belonging to this neighbourhood, sir: a stranger. Haines spoke of a Mr. Freshfield; but was not clear upon the point whether it was for Mr. Freshfield himself, or for a friend

of Mr. Freshfield's. It's all perfectly right, Haines says; he will be answerable for that; rent as safe as if it were paid beforehand."

"Well, I shall be glad to let the house," returned Mr. Chandos. "You need not rise, Miss Hereford; we are not discussing secrets. It has been empty these nine months, you know, Dexter; and empty houses bring no good to themselves."

"Very true, sir. I had an offer for it some days back, and did not trouble you with it, for I know you would not have accepted the tenant. It was that Major Mann, and his rough lot," added Mr. Dexter, dropping his voice.

"Oh," shortly replied Mr. Chandos, his lip curling. "I should be sorry to have them within hail of my gates."

"I was sure of that. He pressed hard, though; seemed to have taken a fancy for the place. I put him off as civilly as I could: it's no use to make enemies of people, where it can be helped. 'My Lady Chandos will only let it to a quiet tenant,' I told him. 'Wants a Darby and Joan, perhaps?' said he, turning up his nose. 'Something of that sort, major,' I answered; and so the

thing dropped through. Haines assures me the present applicant is most respectable; all that could be desired."

"Very well, Dexter, I give you power to treat. You know who would be acceptable and who not, just as well as I do."

"Haines wants the bargain to be concluded to-day, sir," said Mr. Dexter, rising. "He has orders to furnish at once."

"Is Haines going to furnish?"

"As it appears. I should fancy it may be for somebody arriving from abroad. There's plenty of money, Haines says. I had better put a man or two on to the garden at once, had I not, sir?"

"Yes. And don't have those complaints about the locks, Dexter, as we had, you may remember, when the last house on the estate was let. Let them be examined throughout."

"I'm off, then," said Mr. Dexter. "Good-day, sir. My respects to my lady. Good-day, ma'am."

"Good-day," I answered.

"Possessions bring trouble, Miss Hereford," cried Mr. Chandos, as Mr. Dexter moved away.

“There are several houses on this estate, and they are almost as much plague as profit. One tenant finds fault and grumbles; another must have this, that, and the other done; a third runs away, leaving no rent behind him, and his premises dilapidated. Our last agent was not a desirable one; accepted tenants who were not eligible, and did not look after details. He died some months back, and a pretty game we found he had been carrying on; grinding the tenants down, and cheating us. Dexter, recently appointed, appears to be a keen man of business, and straightforward: that is, as agents go: they are none of them too honest.”

“I think I should let the houses for myself, sir, on my own estate, and not employ an agent.”

“Do you mean that as a piece of advice to me, Miss Hereford?” he returned, smiling. “What I might do on my own estate, I cannot answer for: but this one is not mine. It belongs to my brother, Sir Thomas Chandos. The mistress of it for the time being is my mother; but I take the trouble off her hands. Here’s Dexter coming back again!”

“It is not often I go away and leave half my errand undone, though I have this time,” Mr. Dexter called out as he came up, and extended the roll of paper he held. “This is the plan of the proposed alteration in the stables at the farm, sir, which you wished to look over. Shall I carry it to the house?”

“By no means. I’ll carry it myself, if you will give it me,” replied Mr. Chandos. And the agent finally departed.

“Are you sufficiently rested, Miss Hereford?”

My answer was to rise and proceed towards the house. Mr. Chandos, walking by my side, seemed absorbed in the roll, which he had partially opened. On the right the drive leading to the stables branched off. I was glad that Mr. Chandos passed on, and did not propose to go to Nero then. Lady Chandos came forward as we were entering the portico.

“What is this—about the dog attacking you, Miss Hereford?” she exclaimed.

I was so taken to, after the wish expressed by Mr. Chandos, and the promise I had given him, that I remained like a stupid mute. He answered.

“Nero got loose, mother. Miss Hereford was in the act of entering the gate—or had just entered, was it not, Miss Hereford?—and he like a castle’s zealous watch-dog, prevented her advancing further.”

“Did he touch you, Miss Hereford?” Lady Chandos asked, turning to me.

“He was not quick enough, madam: I ran back beyond the gate. My fear was, that he would leap over; but he did not. Perhaps it was too high.”

“But he would have attacked you had you not gone back?”

“I think he would. He seemed very savage.”

“Harry, this is just what I have feared,” Lady Chandos observed to her son, in a peculiarly significant tone. “A fierce, powerful dog, like that, *is* liable to break his chain and get loose; and I have said so to you over and over again. He would attack a stranger—any one he did not know, and might cause a fearful disturbance. You know why I have feared this.”

“The stables are safely closed at night,

mother," was the somewhat curious reply of Mr. Chandos.

"Robin says the dog sprang through the window; dashed through the glass. There can be no security against that, day or night."

"My opinion is, that some of the men must have been teasing him, and so worked him into a fury. I shall inquire into it, and if I find it to be the fact, whoever did it shall go. Better precaution shall be observed for the future."

"Yes," said Lady Chandos, in a decisive tone, "and that precaution must be the sending away of the dog."

"But really, mother, there is no necessity."

"Harry, I am surprised at you. You know why I urge it: why I ought to urge it."

The conversation did not make me feel very comfortable, and I interposed. "I do beg that no change may be made on my account, Lady Chandos. No harm is done. I am not hurt."

"It is not on your account I am speaking, Miss Hereford. And—as you are not hurt—I am pleased that the thing has happened, because it must prove to Mr. Chandos the necessity of

sending away the dog. He could not see it previously."

"I should see it equally with you, mother, were the dog to be insecurely fastened. But if we make him secure——"

"You deemed him secure now," she interrupted. "I will not risk it. Good heavens, Harry! have you forgotten the stake?"

"What stake?" I thought, as I went up to my room. Certainly the words savoured of something that I could not comprehend.

Standing at the window at the head of the stairs was the young lady whom they called Mrs. Chandos. She wore a bonnet and shawl, and spoke as I approached.

"I do believe it is raining!"

"Yes," I replied; "some drops were falling when I came in."

But it appeared that Mrs. Chandos, when she spoke, had not thought she was addressing me, for she turned round in astonishment at the sound of my voice.

"Oh—I beg your pardon," she coldly said. And then I saw that she had a white kitten in

her arms. I went into my room, but did not close the door, and in a minute I heard the approach of Mrs. Freeman.

“Did you ever know anything so tiresome?” exclaimed Mrs. Chandos to her. “It is raining fast. I am sure it is not once in a month, hardly, that I make up my mind to walk in the grounds, but so sure as I do, I am prevented. It rains; or it snows; or it’s too hot; or there’s thunder in the air! It comes on purpose, I know.”

“Perhaps it will not be much,” replied Mrs. Freeman; who, by the sound of her voice, appeared to be also now looking out at the window.

“It will: look at those clouds, gathering fast into one thick mass. Oo-oh!” she added, with a shiver, “I don’t like to hear the dripping of the rain on the trees: it puts me in mind of—of——”

“Of what, my dear?” asked Mrs. Freeman.

“Of the night I first heard those awful tidings. It was raining then, a steady soaking rain, and I had been listening to its falling on the leaves till the monotony of the sound worried me, and I began wishing *he* was at home. Not on these

trees, you know ; we were at the other place. Drop, drop, drop ; as the rain never sounds but where there are trees for it to fall on. The opening of the room-door interrupted me, and my lady came in. Ah ! I shall never forget her ; her face was white, her eyes looked wild, her hands were lifted ; I saw there was something dreadful to be told. She sat down, and, drawing me to her, said——”

“ Hush—sh—sh !” interposed Mrs. Freeman, with sharp caution. “ You may be speaking for other ears than mine.”

“ I was not going to allude to *facts*,” was the retort of Mrs. Chandos, her tone peevish at the interruption. “ My lady asked me if I could bear trouble ; fiery trouble, such as had rarely overtaken one in my rank of life before ; and my answer was to fall into a fainting fit at her feet. Never, since then, have I liked to hear the rain pattering down on the leaves where the trees are thick.”

I would have shut my door, but feared it might look ungracious to do so. They had eyes, and could see that it was open, if they pleased to

look ; therefore they might choose their subjects accordingly. Mrs. Chandos resumed.

“ Who *is* that young lady ? She came up the stairs, and I spoke without looking round, thinking it was you.”

“ I don’t know who. A Miss Hereford. She came here with Madame de Mellissie as travelling companion.”

“ But she is a stranger to Lady Chandos ?”

“ Entirely so.”

“ Then why does Lady Chandos permit her to be here ? Is it well, in this house of misfortune ? Is it prudent ?”

“ Scarcely so. Of course Lady Chandos can only hope—how you are squeezing that kitten, my dear !”

“ Pretty little thing ! it likes to be squeezed,” responded Mrs. Chandos. “ It is hiding itself from you ; from that ugly bonnet. You do wear frightful bonnets, Mrs. Freeman ; as ugly as the black ones of Lady Chandos.”

“ I do not think widows’ bonnets ugly,” was the reply of Mrs. Freeman. “ To some faces they are particularly becoming.”

“They are so ugly, so disfiguring, that I hope it will be long before I am called upon to wear them,” returned Mrs. Chandos, speaking impulsively. “Were my husband to die—but there! I know what you want to say; why do I dwell upon trifles such as bonnets, when heavy calamities are on the house?”

“Suppose you walk about the gallery, my dear?” suggested Mrs. Freeman. “I see no chance of the rain’s leaving off.”

“No, I’ll go back and take my things off, and play with pussy. Poor pussy wanted a walk in the grounds as much as I did. Oh,”—with a shriek—“it’s gone!”

For the kitten, allured, perhaps, by the attractions of a promenade in the grounds, had leaped from the arms of Mrs. Chandos on to a shrub below. I saw it from my window. The shriek brought out Mr. Chandos from the house; he looked up.

“My kitten, Harry,” she said. “It has flown away from me. Get it, will you? But I am sorry to give you the trouble.”

Mr. Chandos took the kitten from the bush

and once more looked up ; at my window as well as at theirs.

“ Who will come for it ? Will you, Miss Hereford ? — and oblige my — oblige Mrs. Chandos.”

Oblige my—*what* ? Was he going to say “ sister-in-law ” when he suddenly stopped himself ? But, if so, why should he have stopped himself ? And how could she be his sister-in-law ? Were she the wife of Sir Thomas, she would be Lady Chandos ; and Emily had said her brother Thomas was not married. She had said she had but two brothers, Thomas and Harry ; who, then, was this young Mrs. Chandos ? That she had a husband living was apparent, from the conversation I had just heard ; and I had imagined all along that she must be the daughter-in-law of Lady Chandos.

These thoughts passed through my head as I ran down for the kitten. Mr. Chandos handed it to me, and turned away, for he was called to by some one at a distance. At the same moment the kitten was taken from my hands. It was by Mrs. Freeman, who had also come down.

"I hope it is not hurt, poor thing," she said, looking at it. "It seems lively enough."

"Mr. Chandos said it was not hurt, when he gave it to me."

"Oh, that's right. Had it been hurt, Mrs. Chandos would have grieved over it. She is fond of this kitten; and she has so few pleasures, poor child!"

"Who *is* Mrs. Chandos?" I asked, in a low tone.

"Madam?" returned Mrs. Freeman.

The tone—cold, haughty, reserved—struck me as conveying the keenest reproach for my unjustifiable curiosity; unjustifiable so far as that I had betrayed it. I faltered forth the question again—for she seemed looking at me and waiting; and it might be that she had not heard it.

"Who *is* Mrs. Chandos?"

"Mrs. Chandos?" was the answer. "Who should she be? She is Mrs. Chandos." And Mrs. Freeman stalked away.

That same evening at dusk, the dog Nero was taken away. A few words spoken by Hickens to his master enlightened me as to the exit.

“ Is he going to be shot ? ” I asked, impulsively, of Mr. Chandos.

“ Oh no. A farmer living near has promised to take care of him.”

But the tone was not quite so free as usual, and I said no more.

CHAPTER III.

A SHOCK.

THE time passed monotonously. Always looking upon myself as an intruder, an unwelcome interloper, I could not feel at home at Chandos. A letter arrived in course of post from Emily de Mellissie, saying she had found her husband certainly ill, but not as much so as "*la mère*" had been willing to lead them to expect. In a few days she should write and fix the date of her return. I was at a loss what to do in more senses than one. Not liking to sit down to the piano uninvited—and no one did invite me—it remained closed. Now and then, when I knew that neither Lady Chandos nor her son was at home, I would play quietly for a few minutes—stealthily might be the best term. Twice Lady Chandos took me for a drive; she went herself

every day ; generally taking Mrs. Chandos. The latter I very rarely saw at any time.

And so I was reduced to walking and reading. Newspapers, books, and reviews lay about the room. Had I been anything of a dress-maker, I should have made up the dresses bought in Paris, failing the money to give them out ; as it was, they lay in my large trunk, unmade. Mr. Chandos had told me the books in the library were at my service, and I chose some of them.

One morning, when I had gone in to get a book, Lady Chandos, passing the door, saw me and came in. I was standing before a book-case in the darkest part of the room ; before which the inner curtains had always been drawn. They were undrawn now, but the doors were locked as usual.

“ Are you searching for a book, Miss Hereford ? ”

“ Yes, madam. Amidst so many——”

The sight of Lady Chandos’s face caused my sentence to fail. The evident astonishment with which she gazed on the book-case ; the displeased, nay, the dismayed, expression of her countenance, was something curious. In my timidity, I feared

she might think I had undrawn the curtains. There appeared to be books of all kinds, shapes, and sizes, inside; pamphlets and loose papers. Mr. Chandos happened to come out of his room, and she called him.

“Harry,” she began, in a sharp, authoritative tone, “who has been at this book-case, and left the curtains undrawn?”

“It must have been Mrs. Chandos,” he replied, advancing to his mother’s side. “The doors are locked, I see; there’s no great harm done.”

“No harm!” repeated Lady Chandos; “look here.”

She pointed to a name written on the white paper cover of one of the books. Mr. Chandos knitted his brow as he bent closer.

“Very thoughtless of her; very negligent,” murmured Lady Chandos. “I have said before the keys ought not to be entrusted to Ethel.”

As I quitted the room quietly, not liking to stay in it, I saw Mr. Chandos take a bunch of keys from his pocket; and, subsequently, heard the silk curtains drawn close, and the doors re-locked. Never should I feel free to go to the

book-cases again. I had one volume of Shakespeare out, and must make the most of it.

We were having lovely days, and this was one of them. I strolled out, the book in my hand. But, before settling to read, I went to the gates to see how they were getting on with the opposite house. They had been busy furnishing it for two or three days, and I—for want of something better to do—had taken an interest in it, and watched the things going in. It appeared all in order this morning ; there was no bustle, no litter ; curtains were up, blinds were half-drawn, and smoke was ascending from more than one chimney. The tenant or tenants must have arrived and taken possession.

As I stood leaning over the small side-gate, there came out of that house a man ; a gentleman, to appearance ; short, and with a dark face. But of the latter I caught but a passing glimpse, for he turned his back immediately to look up at the front of the house. Calling to a man-servant, he appeared to be pointing out something that he wished done, or finding fault with something that had been left undone. I could not hear the

words, but I could the tones ; they were authoritative, as was his manner. He was evidently the master.

I thought I had seen him before, for there was something in his figure, and even in the passing sight of his face, which struck upon me as being familiar. I waited for him to turn again, that I might obtain a better view ; but he did not, and soon went in. I walked back to a shady bench, and began reading. It was underneath the trees that shaded the side of the broad open walk. Presently the sound of two people, apparently encountering each other, reached me from behind the shrubs.

“Are you here alone, Ethel ?” was asked by Mr. Chandos.

“Yes, I took a fancy to come ; I and my kitten. Mrs. Freeman said wait an hour or two, and perhaps she could come with me. She is ill.”

“What ails her ?”

“I don’t know. She oftens complains now ; pains come in her head.”

“Did you unlock the book-case in the library and leave the curtains undrawn ?”

“ What book-case ?” returned Mrs. Chandos.

“ *That* book-case.”

“ What next, Harry ! As if I should do anything of the sort !”

“ You had the keys last night. And no one opens that book-case but yourself.”

“ I did open that book-case, I remember, and undraw the curtains ; I thought they were dusty, but I’m sure I thought I drew them again. I’m very sorry.”

“ Be more cautious for the future, Ethel. Lady Chandos is vexed. You see, while this young lady is in the house——”

“ But I cannot see what business she has in the library,” interrupted Mrs. Chandos, in a quick complaining tone. “ A stranger has no right to the run of the house. I think you must be all out of your minds to have her here at all.”

“ In regard to the library, Ethel, I told her——”

They were the last words that reached me. Mrs. Chandos, ever changeable, was walking rapidly to the house again. Presently Mr.

Chandos came down the broad walk, saw me, and approached.

“Are you fond of Shakespeare’s works?” he asked, when he knew what I was reading.

“I have never read them, sir.”

“Never read them!” he cried, in surprise.
“You cannot mean that, Miss Hereford.”

“But, sir, I have always been at school. And school-girls have no opportunity of obtaining such works. At my English school, Miss Fenton’s, there were some volumes of Shakespeare in the governess’s private parlour; but I never saw anything of them but their backs.”

“Have you never read Byron?”

“Oh no.”

“Nor any novels?”

“Not any books of that kind.”

He looked at me with a half smile, standing with his back against a tree. “I think I understood from my sister that you are an orphan?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Have you no home?”

“I have neither home nor relatives. The place that seems more like a home to me than

any other is Mademoiselle Barlieu's, at Nulle. I was there four years."

" Did you never get any French novels there?"

" Indeed no."

" My sister told me she did."

" I don't see how that could have been, sir, unless she read them when she was out. Miss Chandos visited a great deal."

" Yes, to her cost."

He drew in his lips when he spoke, like one in pain, and his blue eyes—they were so dark as to be purple in some lights—went out far away, as if looking into the past.

" We were too closely superintended to admit of our reading any books, unless by permission ; as to novels, the Miss Barlieus would have been in fits at the thought. And since I left them I have been too fully occupied to read for recreation. This is the first leisure time I have had for nearly as long as I can remember."

" Indeed ! It must seem strange to you."

" So strange, sir, that I am not sure whether I like it or not."

Mr. Chandos laughed. “ Did you visit much, when you were at Nulle ?”

“ No, sir. I had not a friend in the town. Towards the last, Miss Annette would sometimes take me when she went out to spend the evening.”

“ Will you allow me to direct your reading, Miss Hereford ?” he returned, after a pause.

“ Oh, sir, if you would !” I answered eagerly. “ For in truth that library seems to me like a wild sea, with its multitude of books.”

“ Yes ; and a young lady might get amidst shoals ; for all the books are not equally worthy !”

“ Perhaps, sir, you will look out a few and give to me.”

“ I will, with pleasure.”

“ Thank you. Meanwhile, may I go on with this, as I have begun it ?”

He left the tree, took the book from my hand and looked at it. “ ‘ Othello ;’ yes, you may read that.”

As he returned the book to me and resumed his position against the tree, some one approached

from the outer gate. I thought it was a visitor. He came strolling on in the very middle of the broad avenue, his arms underneath his coat-tails ; and soon I perceived it was the gentleman I had seen at the newly-occupied house, giving his directions to the servant. But ah ! as he neared us, remembrance, with its cold chill of terror, struck upon my heart. I knew him instantly. It was Mr. Edwin Barley. Mr. Edwin Barley, and not in the least altered.

“ Do you want anything, sir ? ” demanded Mr. Chandos. For the intruder was passing us without ceremony, and turning his head about from side to side as curiously and freely as he might have done on the public road.

“ I don’t want anything,” was the independent answer, and Mr. Edwin Barley stood and faced Mr. Chandos as he spoke it, looking at him keenly. “ The open air is free to walk in, I believe.”

“ Quite so—when you are without these boundaries. But these are private property.”

“ I am aware that they are the grounds belonging to Chandos House ; but I did not

know a stranger might not be permitted to walk in them."

"Lady Chandos prefers privacy. Strangers are not in the habit of entering here; nor can their doing so be sanctioned."

"I presume that I am speaking to Mr. Harry Chandos?"

Mr. Chandos bowed his head, very coldly. Mr. Edwin Barley bowed in his turn; it might have been called an introduction.

"I will retreat," he said, "and I suppose I must beg your pardon for intruding. It did not occur to me that my strolling in might be unwelcome."

Mr. Chandos said nothing to detain him, and Mr. Edwin Barley raised his hat and departed. Mr. Chandos returned the courtesy, and looked after him.

"Who can he be, I wonder? I don't much like his face."

"I think it is the new tenant, sir. I saw him at the house just now."

"*He* the tenant!" returned Mr. Chandos.

“Miss Hereford, what is the matter with you? You are as white as that statue.”

I turned it off, giving no explanation; and Mr. Chandos walked towards the gate. I dare-say I did look white, for the sight of Mr. Edwin Barley brought back all the old horror of the events that had occurred during my sojourn in his house. Not that it was so much the recollection that drove the colour from my cheeks, as the dread fear that he should recognise me; though why I should have feared it, I did not know. Little chance was there of that—had I been calm enough to judge the matter sensibly. While Mr. Edwin Barley had remained stationary in appearance, I had changed from a child into a woman.

But what had brought Mr. Edwin Barley entering as the tenant of that small and inferior house? he, with his fine fortune and his fine estates! There seemed to be mystery enough at Chandos: was this going to be another mystery?

“I believe you must be right, Miss Hereford; he has entered the house,” said Mr. Chandos, returning. “If he is really the new tenant—as

I suppose he is—he appears by no means a pre-possessing one. I wonder what his name may be?"

I could not, for the whole world, have told Mr. Chandos that I knew his name; I could not have told that I knew him. All my hope was that it would never be betrayed that I had known him, that he was any connection of mine, or that he would ever recognise me. What, what could have brought Edwin Barley to Chandos?

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW TENANT BY THE LODGE GATES.

THE new tenant by the lodge gates ! And it was Edwin Barley ! What could have brought him to Chandos ?

Was it to look after me ?

The conviction that it was so, fixed itself in my mind with startling force, and I grew nearly as sick with fear as I had been when I was a little child. That he was personally unknown to the Chandos family was evident : it seemed a strange thing that he should come and plant himself down at their very gates as soon as I became an inmate in the family. Had he in some crafty manner made himself acquainted with my entrance to it the very hour it took place ? Surely it must have been so. And he had lost no time in following.

When once suspicion connected with fear arises

in man's mind, or in woman's, the most trifling circumstances are allowed to confirm it. Events, however unconnected with it in reality, accidental coincidences that have no rapport (I'm afraid that's a French word, but I can't help it) with it whatever, are converted by the suggestive imagination into suspicious proofs, and looked upon as links in the chain. It might have occurred to my mind—it did occur to it—that it was just within the range of possibility Mr. Edwin Barley's advent had nothing whatever to do with me or my presence at Chandos, that it might be wholly unconnected with it, and he ignorant of it and of who I was; but I threw this view away at once in my fear, and did not glance at it a second time. Edwin Barley had come to Chandos because I was there, and no power of reasoning could have removed this impression from me. All these years, and he had never (so far as appeared) sought to put himself in personal connection with the family: why should he have done it now, save for my presence in it?

Thought is quick. Before Mr. Chandos re-

turned to me from watching Edwin Barley out at the lodge gates and across the road, I had gone over it all in my mind, and arrived at my unpleasant conviction. Some dim idea of putting as great a space of ground between me and him as was practicable, caused me to rise hastily from the garden-chair and turn to go in-doors. Mr. Chandos walked by my side, talking of various things—the leaves that were beginning to fall, the fineness of the early autumn day, the discontent of Mr. Nero in his new home at the farmer's—having apparently forgotten already the episode of the intrusion. I answered in monosyllables, scarcely knowing what, my mind full of its new trouble.

I had done no harm during my short sojourn at Mr. Edwin Barley's, in those long past days ; I had never heard of or from him since ; he had never, so far as I knew, inquired after me ; so why should I fear him now ? I cannot answer this : I have never been able to answer it—no, not even since things, dark and mysterious then, have been made clear. The fear had taken possession of me, and probably seemed

all the worse because it was vague and inexplicable.

Luncheon was on the table when we turned into the oak-parlour, and Lady Chandos ready for it. Hickens was uncorking a bottle of claret.

“Harry, Hickens says that our new tenant has arrived,” observed Lady Chandos.

We were sitting down then, and Mr. Chandos did not immediately reply. Perhaps Hickens thought the news required confirmation, for he turned round from the sideboard.

“The gentleman took possession last night, sir; so Brooks tells me: himself and four or five servants. It is only a single gentleman; there’s no family. Immensely rich, they say.”

“Do you know who he is, Harry?” pursued Lady Chandos.

“I don’t know who he is, but I have just seen himself,” replied Mr. Chandos. “He came in at our gates, deeming Chandos public property. I had to warn him off by telling him it was private.”

“What did he want?” asked Lady Chandos.

“Nothing, except to look about him. Had I known he was your new tenant, I might not have been in so great a hurry to eject him.”

“Oh, but, Harry, it was as well to do it. Better to let him understand from the first that we cannot have strangers entering here at will. It would not suit me, you know ; I like privacy.”

“That is what I told him.”

“I suppose you were civil ?”

“Quite civil, both of us—on the surface, at any rate. I did not take to him at first sight ; that is, to his looks ; and I don’t fancy he took to me. There was something peculiar in the tone of his voice, and he eyed me as though he wished to take my photograph.”

“He did not know you, I dare say.”

“He said he supposed he was speaking to Mr. Harry Chandos. Perhaps he thought it discourteous to be warned off in that manner. Not that he looks like one to go in for much courtesy himself : there was an air of independence about him *almost* bordering upon insolence. This young lady, I fancy, was not prepossessed in his favour.”

I had sat with my head bent on my plate, trying to seem unconcerned, as if the matter were no business of mine. The sudden address of Mr. Chandos turned my face crimson. Lady Chandos looked at me.

“He—is very ugly,” I stammered in my perplexity.

“Is he?” she cried, turning to her son.

“He is rather ill-favoured, mother; a short, dark man. There’s one redeeming feature in his face; his teeth. They are small, white, and regular: very beautiful.”

“What is his name?”

“I don’t know,” said Mr. Chandos.

“Not know his name!” repeated Lady Chandos, laughing slightly; “and yet you accepted him as tenant!”

“Oh, well, Dexter made all the arrangements. I did not interfere personally.”

“I think, before I accepted a man as tenant, I should make myself acquainted with his name,” spoke Lady Chandos, in a half-joking tone, evidently attaching no importance to the matter. “Do you happen to have heard it, Hickens?”

“No, my lady.”

“We shall learn it soon enough,” carelessly observed Mr. Chandos. “A man may not make a less desirable tenant because he happens not to have a handsome face. Tastes differ, you know, Miss Hereford. Were we all bought and sold by our looks, what a squabbling of opinions there’d be!”

The meal was nearly over, when a startling interruption occurred. Mrs. Chandos burst wildly into the room, agitated, trembling; her hands raised, her face ashy white. Mr. Chandos threw down his knife and fork, and rose in consternation.

“Oh, Lady Chandos! Oh, Harry!” came the words, almost in a shriek. “Do come! She has fallen on the carpet in a fit—or something. I think she may be dying!”

“Excited again, Ethel!” observed Lady Chandos, the perfect calmness of her tone presenting a curious contrast. “When will you learn to take trifles quietly and rationally? Who has fallen? The white kitten?”

Mrs. Chandos did not like the reproach.

“ There’s nothing to blame me for this time,” she said, with a sob of vehemence. “ It is Mrs. Freeman. She is lying there on the floor, looking frightful. I am not sure but she’s dead.”

“ Take care of her, Harry,” said Lady Chandos. “ I will see what it is.”

“ Shall I go?” he asked. “ It may be better. You can stay with Ethel.”

Lady Chandos only answered by waving him back, as she quitted the room. Mrs. Chandos trembled excessively, and Mr. Chandos placed her in an easy chair.

“ Calm yourself, Ethel—as my mother says.”

“ What nonsense you talk, Harry ! As if everybody could have their feelings under control as she has—as you have ! Time was when I was calm and heedless enough, Heaven knows, but since—since—you know ?”

“ Yes, yes ; be still now. I think you might acquire a little more self-control if you tried, considering that excitement does you so much harm.”

“ It weakens me ; it lays me prostrate for

three or four days. I don't know what other harm it does me."

"It not that enough? Where is Mrs. Freeman?"

"She is in my dining-room. I will tell you what happened. We were at luncheon—that is, I was, for she sat by the window, and would not take any: she has complained of illness latterly, as I told you. 'I think you might eat a bit of this fowl,' I said to her; 'it is very nice.' Well, she made no answer; so I spoke again. Still she said nothing, and I got up to look at her, wondering whether she could have dropped asleep in a minute. I went round the chair, and there she was with a face drawn in the most frightful manner you can conceive, and the next moment she had slipped from the chair to the carpet. And you and Lady Chandos blame me for not retaining my calmness."

"Will you take anything?" he inquired, pointing to the luncheon-tray; and it struck me that he wished to get the scene she had described out of her memory.

"No, thank you. The sight of Mrs. Freeman

has taken my appetite away. Suppose you come and see her for yourself: I don't mind going with you."

Mrs. Chandos put her arm within his, and they departed. Hill ran upstairs; two or three of the maids followed her. Hickens looked after them in curiosity, and then came back to his luncheon-table. Not to be in the way of anybody, I went up to my room.

For some hours I saw none of them. There was bustle in the house. Lady Chandos's voice I heard now and then, and once I caught a glimpse of Mr. Chandos in the grounds. Getting tired of my confinement, I looked out, and asked a maid-servant, who was passing in the corridor, what had been the matter.

"It was a sort of fit, miss, but she's better now," was Harriet's reply. "The doctor says she must be still, and have rest for some time to come, and she is going away this evening."

"Going away! Do you speak of Mrs. Freeman?"

"Yes, miss. She is going by her own choice. She has a sister who lives about thirteen miles

from this, and she wishes to go at once to her house. My lady urged her to wait, at any rate until to-morrow, but Mrs. Freeman said she would rather go, especially as she can be of no further use at present to Mrs. Chandos. They have a suspicion that she fears another attack, and thinks she had better get to her sister's without delay. So it's all settled, and Hill is to accompany her."

Harriet departed, leaving my door on the latch. I sat, reading and listening by turns, and presently there sounded two more encountering voices outside. Those of Lady Chandos and Hill, her attendant.

"My lady," said the latter, in one of those loud whispers which penetrate the ear worse than open speaking, "is it right that I should go to-night? I could not allude to it before Mrs. Chandos."

"Why should it not be right, Hill?"

"It is the full of the moon, my lady."

Lady Chandos paused before replying, possibly in reflection. "There is no help for it, Hill," she said, at last. "Mrs. Freeman is too ill

to be trusted to the care of any one but you."

The carriage was brought to the lower door in the wing, unbarred and unbolted for the occasion, and Mrs. Freeman was taken down the enclosed stairs to it, by Mr. Chandos and the doctor, so that I and my curiosity saw nothing of the exit, which I looked upon as an unmerited wrong. She was placed in the carriage, and Hill and the doctor went with her.

It was getting near dinner-time. I scarcely knew whether to go down or not, or whether there would be any dinner at all, in the state of confusion the house seemed to be in, when my doubt was solved by Lady Chandos herself. Looking out at my door, she passed me, coming along the gallery from her own room.

"I think the dinner is ready, Miss Hereford."

Following her down stairs, I saw Mr. Dexter, the agent, in the open portico, having that moment, as it appeared, come to the house. Lady Chandos crossed the hall to speak to him. He put a sealed parcel, or thick letter into her hands.

“I beg your pardon, my lady. As I was passing here, I brought up these papers for Mr. Chandos. The new tenant opposite says there’s something amiss with the roof of the coach-house, and I’m going to call and look at it.”

Lady Chandos glanced casually at the letter she held; and then a thought seemed to strike her.

“What is the name of the new tenant Mr. Dexter?”

“Barley, my lady. Mr. Edwin Barley.”

There was a startled pause. Lady Chandos suddenly put her hand to her heart, as if some pang had taken it.

“Barley!” she repeated. “Edwin Barley! Do you know whether he comes from Hallam?”

“Hallam?—Hallam?” debated Mr. Dexter with himself, in consideration. “Yes, that *is* the place he comes from. I remember now. ‘Edwin Barley, Esquire, of the Oaks, Hallam.’ That’s the address in the deed of agreement. Good-day, my lady.”

She did not attempt to detain him. With the look of awful consternation on her livid face,

she turned to come back. I slipped into the dining-room, and sat down in a shady nook by the piano, hoping not to have been seen. The cloth was laid, but no servants were in the room. Only Mr. Chandos, and he stood at a side-table looking into his desk, his back to the room.

“ Harry ! Harry !”

Turning at the tones of unmistakeable terror, Mr. Chandos came swiftly to his mother, and took her hand.

“ The new tenant,” she gasped—and I think it was the only time I ever saw Lady Chandos excited ; she, who imparted always the idea of calmness intensified ; who had reproached Mrs. Chandos with allowing emotion to sway her !

“ The man by our entrance-gates !”

“ Yes, yes ! what of him ?” cried Mr. Chandos, when she stopped from pain. “ My dear mother, what has alarmed you ?”

“ It is Edwin Barley.”

“ Who ?” almost shouted Mr. Chandos.

“ Edwin Barley. Here at our very gates !”

Whatever calamity the words might imply, it seemed nearly to overwhelm Mr. Chandos. He

dropped his mother's hands, and stood looking at her.

" Is the agreement signed, Harry ? "

" Yes."

" Then we cannot get rid of him ! What can have brought him here ? Here, of all places in the world ! Chance, think you ? "

" No. Chance it cannot have been. I told you the new tenant had an ill-favoured face. He——"

Mr. Chandos stopped : Hickens and the footman were coming in. The soup was put on the table, and we sat down to dinner. As I moved forward from my corner, quietly and unobtrusively, looking as if I had neither seen nor heard, Lady Chandos turned to me with a start, a red flush darkening her cheeks. But I don't believe she knows, to this hour, whether I had been present during the scene, or had come in with the soup and the servants.

The dinner was eaten in almost total silence. Lady and Mr. Chandos were absorbed in their own thoughts ; I in mine. The chance words of the agent, " Mr. Edwin Barley of the Oaks," had

disclosed the fact that the simple-minded old man who had been so kind to me was dead, and his brother reigned in his stead, lord of all. A rich man, indeed, Edwin Barley must be. I think the servants in waiting must have seen that something was amiss ; though, perhaps, the silence did not strike upon them so ominously as it did on my own self-consciousness.

You cannot have failed to note—and I think I have said it—that there was little ceremony observed in the every-day life at Chandos. Ten minutes after dinner, tea was rung for. Lady Chandos sat while it was brought in, and the dessert taken away.

“ Will you oblige me by presiding at tea this evening, Miss Hereford ? ”

Had Lady Chandos not preferred the request at once, I should have withdrawn to my own room, with an excuse that I did not wish for any tea. How miserably uncomfortable I felt, sitting with them, an interloper, when I knew they must want to be talking together, and were wishing me, naturally, at the other end of the earth, none but myself can tell. I poured

out the tea. Lady Chandos drank one sup, and rose.

“I must go to sit with Ethel, Harry. Will you come?”

“She does not want me,” was his reply. And Lady Chandos left the room.

He let his tea stand until it was quite cold, evidently forgetting it; forgetting all but his own thoughts. I sat in patient silence. Awakening later out of his reverie, he drank it down at a draught, and rang the bell for the things to be taken away. As the man left the room with them, I happened to look at Mr. Chandos, who was then standing near the mantelpiece, and caught his eyes fixed on me, something peculiar in their expression.

“Mr. Chandos,” I took courage to say, “I am very sorry to be in this position—an intruder here.”

“And but for one thing I should be very glad of it,” was his ready answer. “It is a pleasant in-break on our monotonous life.”

“And that one thing, sir?”

“Ah! I cannot tell you all my secrets,” he

said, with a light laugh. “ Do you make yourself at home, young lady. But for your book, that I know you are longing to be reading again, I should have compunction at leaving you alone.”

He quitted the room, laughing still. I reached the book he alluded to, and sat down again. But I could not read ; the surprise was too new, and thought upon thought kept crowding upon me. *They* evidently had cause to fear Edwin Barley, far more than I ; perhaps then, after all, he had not come here to look after me ? What the matter or the mystery could be, I knew not : but unmistakeably there was something wrong between him and Chandos.

It was turned half-past ten when Lady Chandos came back again to the oak-parlour. I had got to my book then, and was buried in it. Mr. Chandos followed her nearly immediately, and began to wish us good-night.

“ You must be tired, Harry,” she observed.
“ You have had a fatiguing day.”

“ I am tired,” was his reply. “ I shall sleep to-night without rocking. Good-night, mother ; good-night, Miss Hereford.”

He left the room. Lady Chandos said she was tired too, and she and I went out together. Mr. Chandos, who had stayed in the hall, speaking to Hickens, went up just before us, entered his room and closed the door. I turned into mine ; and I heard Lady Chandos traverse the long gallery and shut herself into the west wing.

Instead of undressing, what should I do but put back the curtains and shutters, sit down and open my book again. Only for two minutes, of course, said I to my conscience. It was that most charming of all romances, whether of Scott's works or of others, the "Bride of Lammermoor," which Mr. Chandos had given me out the previous day. The two minutes grew into—but that I have to do it, I should not confess how many, especially as I could only guess at the number. My watch—the pretty watch of Selina's, given me so long ago by Mr. Edwin Barley—had latterly acquired a trick of stopping. It had been so delightful ! sitting there with that enchanting romance, the window open to the bright night and balmy air.

Perhaps, after all, it was not more than twelve o'clock. I wound up the defaulting watch, shook it till it went again ; set it at twelve by guess, and undressed slowly, and in silence. Then, putting out the light, I threw on a warm shawl, and leaned out of the window for a last look, before closing it. Which, of course, was a very senseless proceeding, although romantic. If Mademoiselle Annette could have seen me !

I stayed there, lost in thought ; various interests jumbling themselves together in my mind. Lucy Ashton and the Master of Ravenswood ; my own uncertain future and present disagreeable position ; the curious mysteries that seemed to envelop Chandos ; and the ominous proximity of Mr. Edwin Barley. As I leaned against the corner of the window, still as a statue, I was startled by observing a movement in the garden.

And a very extraordinary movement, too, if it was that of a rational being. Something dark, the height of a tall man, appeared to emerge from the clusters of trees skirting the lawn opposite, approach a few steps, and then dart in again ; and this was repeated over and over again,

the man advancing always nearer to the other end of the house. It was like the motions of one who wished to come on, yet feared being seen ; a full minute he stood within those dark trees, each time that he penetrated them.

I watched, still as a mouse, and gazed eagerly, feeling like one chilled with a sudden fear. It was certainly very singular, When opposite the west wing, he stood for a minute out on the open greensward, and took off his round broad-brimmed hat as he looked up at the windows. Then I recognised the features of Mr. Chandos. He wore a short cloak, which in a degree hid his figure ; but there was no mistaking the face, for the moon shone full upon it. The next moment he crossed the grass, and disappeared within the narrow laurel path that led to the private entrance of the west wing.

How had he got out of his room ? That he had not come out of its door, I felt sure ; for I had been so silent that I must have heard it, had it opened ; besides, that door of his would only open with a jerk and a creaking noise. If there was another door to his apartment, it must lead into

the wing inhabited by Mrs. Chandos. Why had he been dodging about in that strange way in the grounds ? and put on a cloak and broad hat to do it in, just as if he wished to disguise himself? And what could he want in the apartments of Lady Chandos in the middle of the night? Truly there *was* mystery at Chandos. But I could not solve it, and went to bed.

“ Good morning, Miss Hereford.”

The salutation came from Mr. Chandos, who was following me into the breakfast-room, having that instant quitted his own. I was going quickly ; so was he ; for we were late, and Lady Chandos liked punctuality. But she was not in the oak-parlour.

“ That’s right,” he cried, when he saw the room empty. “ I hope my mother has overslept herself too, and had as good a night as I have.”

“ Have you had a good night, sir ?” came the involuntary question.

“ Too good : a man does not want eight or nine hours’ sleep. I dropped asleep the minute I got into bed last night ; did not even hear my clock strike eleven, though it only wanted a few minutes

to it ; and I never woke until twenty minutes to eight this morning. I was very tired last night.”

Was Mr. Chandos mystifying me ? Somehow it caused me vexation. My eyes had a resentful expression as I fixed them on his ; which, of course, they had no right in the world to have.

“ You did not go to sleep at eleven o’clock, sir.”

“ Indeed I did, Miss Hereford.”

“ Then you must have got up again, sir.”

“ Nothing of the sort ! Why do you say that ? I never woke until this morning.”

Standing there and deliberately saying this to my face, with every appearance of truth, could only be done to mislead—to deceive me. I had far rather he had struck me a blow ; though *why*, I did not stay to ask myself.

“ Mr. Chandos, I saw you in the grounds in the middle of the night !”

“ Saw me in the grounds in the middle of the night !” he echoed. “ You were dreaming, Miss Hereford.”

“ No, sir ; I was wide awake. It must have been getting on for one o’clock. You had on a

cloak and a low broad-brimmed hat, and were dodging in and out of the trees.”

“What trees?”

“Those opposite.”

“Wearing a cloak and broad hat, and dodging in and out of the opposite trees! Well, that is good, Miss Hereford!”

His face wore an amused expression; his dark eyes—and they were looking dark as purple in the morning light—were dancing with mirth. I turned cross. Some foolish thought, that Mr. Chandos would make a confidant of me in the morning, had run into my mind in the night.

“I don’t possess a cloak, young lady.”

“At any rate, sir, I saw you in one. A short one, a sort of cape. I saw your face quite plainly when you were looking up at the windows. The moon was as bright as day, and shining full upon you.”

“It must decidedly have been my ghost, Miss Hereford.”

“No, sir; it was yourself. I don’t believe in ghosts. When you had finished your dance in and out of the trees, you crossed the grass to the

laurel walk that leads down by the west wing.”

“ What do you say ?”

The tone was an abrupt one ; the manner had entirely changed : something like a glance of fear shot across the face of Mr. Chandos. But at that moment Hill came in.

“ So you are back, Hill !” he exclaimed.

“ I have been back an hour, sir. Mrs. Freeman’s no worse, and I came by the Parliamentary train. And it is well I did come,” added she, “ for I found my lady ill !”

Mr. Chandos swung himself short round on his heel. “ My mother ill ! what is the matter with her ?”

“ Well, sir, I hardly know. I came to ask you to go up and see her.”

“ She was very well last night,” he observed, striding upstairs on his way to the west wing.

“ You had better begin breakfast, miss,” Hill said to me. “ My lady won’t be down ; I’ll go and order it in.”

“ Am I to send any up to Lady Chandos, Hill ?”

“ I have taken my lady’s breakfast up,” was her answer.

The tea and coffee came in, and I waited ; waited, and waited. When I had nearly given Mr. Chandos up, he came. His face was pale, troubled, and he appeared lost in inward thought. From the signs, I gathered that Lady Chandos’s malady was serious.

“ I fear you have found Lady Chandos worse than you anticipated, sir ?”

“ Yes—no—yes—not exactly,” was the contradictory answer. “ I hope it is nothing dangerous,” he more collectedly added ; “ but she will not be able to leave her rooms to-day.”

“ Is she in bed, sir ?”

“ No ; she is sitting up. My tea ? thank you. You should not have waited for me, Miss Hereford.”

He took his breakfast in silence, ringing once for Hickens, to ask after a paper that ought to have come. Afterwards he quitted the room, and I saw him go strolling across to the pine walk.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE IRONING ROOM.

“WILL you allow me to repose a word of confidence in you, Miss Hereford, and at the same time to tender an apology?”

Playing a little bit of quiet harmony, reading a little, musing a little, half-an-hour had passed, and I was leaning my back against the frame of the open window. Mr. Chandos had come across the grass unheard by me, and took me by surprise.

I turned, and stammered forth “Yes.” His tones were cautious and low, as though he feared eavesdroppers, though no one was within hearing ; or could have been, without being seen.

“You accused me of wandering out there last night,” he began, sitting on the stone ledge of the window outside, his face turned to me, “and I rashly denied it to you. As it is within the range

of possibility that you may see me there again at the same ghostly hour, I have been deliberating whether it may not be the wiser plan to impart to you the truth. You have heard of sleep-walkers?"

"Yes," I replied, staring at him.

"What will you say if I acknowledge to being one?"

Of course I did not know what to say, and stood there like a statue, looking foolish. The thought that rushed over my heart was, what an unhappy misfortune to attend the sensible and otherwise attractive Mr. Chandos.

"You see," he continued, "when you spoke, I did not know I had been out, and denied it, really believing you were mistaken."

"And do you positively walk in your sleep, sir?—go out of your room, out of the locked doors of the house, and pace the grounds?" I breathlessly exclaimed.

"Ay. Not a pleasant endowment is it? Stranger things are heard of some who possess it: they spirit themselves on to the roofs of houses, to the tops of chimneys, and contrive to spirit

themselves down again, without coming to harm. So far as I am aware, I have never yet attempted those ambitious feats."

" Does Lady Chandos know of this?"

" Of course. My mother saw me last night, I find: she felt unable to sleep, she says, thinking of poor Mrs. Freeman, and rose from her bed. It was a light night, and she drew aside her curtains and looked from the window. But for her additional testimony, I might not have believed you yet, Miss Hereford."

" You seemed to be making for her apartments, sir—for the little door in the laurel walk."

" Did I?" he carelessly rejoined. " What freak guided my steps thither, I wonder? Did you see me come back again?"

" No, sir. I did not stay much longer at the window."

" I dare say I came back at once. A pity you missed the sight a second time," he continued, with a laugh that sounded very much like a forced one. " Having decorated myself with a cloak and broad hat, I must have been worth seeing. I really

did not know that I had a cloak in my dressing-closet, but I find there is an old one."

He sat still, pulling to pieces a white rose and scattering its petals one by one. His eyes seemed to seek any object rather than mine ; his dark hair, looking in some lights almost purple like his eyes, was impatiently pushed now and again from his brow. Altogether, there was something in Mr. Chandos that morning that jarred upon me—something that did not seem *true*.

"I cannot think, sir, how you could have gone down so quietly from your room. For the first time since I have been in your house—for the first time, I think, in my whole life—I sat up reading last night, and yet I did not hear you ; unless, indeed, you descended by some egress through the east wing."

"Oh, you don't know how quiet and cunning sleep-walkers are ; the stillness with which they carry on their migrations is incredible," was his rejoinder. "You must never be surprised at anything they do."

But I noticed one thing : that he did not deny the existence of a second door. In spite of his

plausible reasoning, I could not divest myself of the conviction that he had not left his chamber by the entrance near mine.

“ Is it a nightly occurrence, sir ?”

“ What—my walking about ? Oh dear, no ! Months and years sometimes elapse, and I have nothing of it. The last time I ‘ walked ’—is not that an ominous word for the superstitious ?—must be at least two years ago.”

“ And then only for one night, sir ?”

“ For more than one,” he replied, a strangely-grave expression settling on his countenance. “ So, if you see me again, Miss Hereford, do not be alarmed, or think I have taken sudden leave of my senses.”

“ Mr. Chandos, can nothing be done for you ? To prevent it, I mean.”

“ Nothing at all.”

“ If—if Lady Chandos, or one of the men-servants were to lock you in the room at night ?” I timidly suggested.

“ And if I—finding egress stopped that way—were to precipitate myself from the window, in my unconsciousness, what then, Miss Hereford ?”

“ Oh, don’t talk of it !” I said, hiding my eyes with a shudder. “ I do not understand these things : I spoke in ignorance.”

“ Happily few do understand them,” he replied. “ I have given you this in strict confidence, Miss Hereford ; you will, I am sure, regard it as such. No one knows of it except my mother ; but she would not like you to speak of it to her.”

“ Certainly not. Then the servants do not know it ?”

“ Not one : not even Hill. It would be most disagreeable to me were the unpleasant fact to reach them ; neither might they be willing to remain in a house where there was a sleep-walker. The last time the roving fit was upon me, some of them unfortunately saw me from the upper window ; they recognised me, and came to the conclusion, by some subtle force of reasoning, explainable only by themselves, that it was my ‘ fetch,’ or ghost. It was the first time I had ever heard of ghosts of the living appearing,” he added, with a slight laugh.

“ Do you think they saw you last night ?” was my next question.

“I hope not,” he replied, in a tone meant to be a light one; but that, to my ear, told of ill-concealed anxiety.

“But—Mr. Chandos!—there are no windows in the servants’ part of the house that look this way!” I exclaimed, the recollection flashing on me.

“There is one. That small gothic window in the turret. The fear that some of them may have been looking out is worrying my mother.”

“It is that, perhaps, that has made Lady Chandos ill.”

“Yes; they took me for my own ghost” he resumed, apparently not having heard the remark. “You now perceive, possibly, why I have told you this, Miss Hereford? You would not be likely to adopt the ghostly view of the affair, and might have spoken of what you saw in the hearing of the servants, or of strangers. You have now the secret: will you keep it?”

“With my whole heart, sir,” was my impulsive rejoinder. “No allusion to it shall ever pass my lips.” And Mr. Chandos took my hand, held it

for a moment, and then departed, leaving me to digest the revelation.

It was a strange one; and I asked myself whether this physical infirmity, attaching to him, was the cause of what had appeared so mysterious at Chandos. That it might account for their not wishing to have strangers located at Chandos, sleeping in the house, was highly probable. Why! was not I myself an illustration of the case in point? I, a young girl, but a week or so in the house, and it had already become expedient to entrust me with the secret! Oh, yes! no wonder, no wonder that they shunned visitors at Chandos! To me it seemed a most awful affliction.

As I quitted the oak-parlour and went upstairs, Hill stood in the gallery.

“Lady Chandos is up, I understand, Hill?”

“Well, I don’t know where you could have understood that,” was Hill’s rejoinder, spoken in a sullen and resentful tone. “My lady up, indeed! ill as she is! If she’s out of her bed in a week hence it will be time enough. *I don’t think she will be.*”

I declare that the words so astonished me as

to take my senses temporarily away, and Hill was gone before I could speak again. Which of the two told the truth, Mr. Chandos or Hill? He said his mother was up; Hill said she was not, and would not be for a week to come.

Meanwhile Hill had traversed the gallery, and disappeared in the west wing, banging the green-baize door after her. I stood in deliberation. Ought I, or ought I not, to proffer a visit to Lady Chandos?—to inquire if I could do anything for her. It seemed to me that it would be respectful so to do, and I moved forward and knocked gently at the green-baize door.

There came no answer, and I knocked again—and again; softly always. Then I pushed it open and entered. I found myself in a narrow passage, richly carpeted, with a handsome oak door before me. I gave a stout knock at that, and the green-baize door made a noise in swinging to. Out rushed Hill. If ever terror was implanted in a woman's face, it was so then in hers.

“Heaven and earth, Miss Hereford! Do you want to send me into my grave with fright?” ejaculated she.

“I have not frightened you! What have I done?”

“Done? Do you know, miss, that no soul is permitted to enter these apartments when my lady is ill, except myself and Mr. Chandos? I knew it was not he; and I thought—I thought—I don’t know what I did not think. Be so good, miss, as not to serve me so again.”

Did she take me for a wild tiger, that she made all that fuss? “I wish to see Lady Chandos,” I said aloud.

“Then you can’t see her, miss,” was the peremptory retort.

“That is, if it be agreeable to her to receive me,” I continued, resenting Hill’s assumption of authority.

“But it is not agreeable, and it never can be agreeable,” returned Hill, working herself up to a great pitch of excitement. “Don’t I tell you, Miss Hereford, my lady never receives in these rooms? Perhaps, miss, you’ll be so good as to quit them.”

“At least you can take my message to Lady Chandos, and inquire whether——”

“I can’t deliver any message, and I decline to make any inquiries,” interrupted Hill, evidently in a fever of anxiety for my absence. “Excuse me, Miss Hereford, but you will please return by the way you came.”

Who should appear next on the scene but Lady Chandos! She came from beyond the oak door, as Hill had done, apparently wondering at the noise. I was thunderstruck. She looked quite well, and wore her usual dress; but she went back again at once, and it was but a momentary glimpse I had of her. Hill made no ceremony. She took me by the shoulders as you would take a child, turned me towards the entrance, and bundled me out; shutting the greenbaize door with a slam, and propping her back against it.

“Now, Miss Hereford, you must pardon me; and remember your obstinacy has just brought this upon yourself. I couldn’t help it; for to have suffered you to talk to my lady to-day would have been almost a matter of life or death.”

“I think you are out of your mind, Hill,” I

gasped, recovering my breath, but not my temper, after the summary exit.

“Perhaps I am, miss ; let it go so. All I have got to say, out of my mind or in my mind, is this : never you attempt to enter this west wing. The rooms in it are sacred to my lady, whose pleasure it is to keep them strictly private. And intrusion here, after this warning, is what would never be pardoned you by any of the family, if you lived to be ninety years old !”

“Hill, you take too much upon yourself,” was my indignant answer.

“If I do, my lady will correct me ; so do not trouble your mind about that, Miss Hereford. I have not been her confidential attendant for sixteen years to be taught my duty now. And when I advise you to keep at a distance from these apartments, miss, I advise you for your own good. If you are wise, you will heed it: ask Mr. Chandos.”

She returned within the wing, and I heard a strong bolt slipped, effectually barring my entrance, had I felt inclined to disobey her ; but I never felt less inclined for anything in my life

than to do that. Certainly her warning had been solemnly spoken.

Now, who was insane?—I? or Lady Chandos? or Hill? It seemed to me that it must be one of us, for assuredly all this savoured of insanity. What was it that ailed Lady Chandos? That she was perfectly well in health, I felt persuaded; and she was up and dressed and active; no symptom whatever of the invalid was about her. Could it be that her mind was affected? or was she so overcome with grief at the previous night's exploits of Mr. Chandos as to be obliged to remain in retirement? The latter supposition appeared the more feasible—and I weighed the case in all its bearings.

But not quite feasible, either. For Hill appeared to be full mistress of the subject of the mystery, whatever it might be, and Mr. Chandos had said she had no suspicion of his malady. And, besides, would it be enough to keep Lady Chandos in for a week? I dwelt upon it all until my head ached; and, to get rid of my perplexities, I went strolling into the open air.

It was a fine sunshiny day, and the blue tint

of the bloom upon the pine trees looked lovely in the gleaming light. I turned down a shady path on the left of the broad gravel drive, midway between the house and the entrance-gates. It took me to a part of the grounds where I had never yet penetrated, remote and very solitary. The path was narrow, scarcely admitting of two persons passing each other, and the privet hedge on either side, with the overhanging trees, imparted to it an air of excessive gloom. The path wound in its course; in turning one of its angles, I came right in the face of some one advancing; some one who was so close as to touch me; and my heart leaped into my mouth. It was Mr. Edwin Barley.

“Good morning, young lady.”

“Good morning, sir,” I stammered, sick almost unto death, lest he should recognise me; though why that excessive dread of his recognition should be upon me, I could not possibly have explained. He was again trespassing on Chandos; but it was not for me, in my timidity, to tell him so; neither had I any business to set myself forward in upholding the rights of Chandos.

“ All well at the house ?” he continued.

“ Yes, thank you. All, except Lady Chandos. She keeps her room this morning.”

“ You are a visitor at Chandos, I presume ?”

“ For a little time, sir.”

“ So I judged, when I saw you with Harry Chandos. That you were not Miss Chandos, who married the Frenchman, I knew, for you bear no resemblance to her ; and she is the only daughter of the family. I fancied they did not welcome strangers at Chandos.”

I made no answer ; though he looked at me with his jet-black eyes as if waiting for it ; the same stern, penetrating eyes as of old. How I wished to get away ! but it was impossible to pass by him without rudeness, and he stood blocking up the confined path.

“ Are you a confidential friend of the family ?” he resumed.

“ No, sir ; I am not to be called a friend at all ; quite otherwise. Until a few days ago, I was a stranger to them. Accident brought me then to Chandos, but my stay here will be temporary.”

“ I should be glad to make your acquaintance by name,” he went on, never taking those terrible eyes off me. Not that the eyes in themselves were so very terrible ; but the fear of my childhood had returned to me in all its force—a very bugbear. I had made the first acquaintance of Mr. Edwin Barley in a moment of fear—that is, he frightened me. Unintentionally on his own part, it is true, but with not less of effect upon me. The circumstances of horror (surely it is not too strong a word) that had followed, in all of which he was mixed up, had only tended to increase the feeling ; and woman-grown though I was now, the meeting with him had brought it all back to me.

“ Will you not favour me with your name ?”

He spoke politely, quite as a gentleman, but I felt my face grow red, white, hot, and cold. I had answered his questions, feeling that I dared not resist ; that I feared to show him aught but civility ; but—to give him my name ; to rush, as it were, into the lion’s jaws ! No, I would not do that ; and I plucked up what courage was left me.

“ My name is of no consequence, sir. I am but a very humble individual, little more than a schoolgirl. I was brought here by a lady, who, immediately upon her arrival, was recalled home by illness in her family, and I am in daily expectation of a summons from her; after which I dare say I shall never see Chandos or any of its inmates again. Will you be kind enough to allow me to pass ?”

“ You must mean Miss Chandos—I don’t recollect her married name,” said he, without stirring. “ I heard she had been here: and left almost as soon as she came.”

I bowed my head, and tried to pass him. I might as readily have tried to pass through the privet hedge.

“ Some lady was taken away ill, yesterday,” he resumed. “ Who was it ?”

“ It was Mrs. Freeman.”

“ Oh ! the companion. I thought as much. Is she very ill ?”

“ It was something of a fit, I believe. It did not last long.”

“ Those fits are ticklish things,” he remarked.

“I should think she will not be in a state to return for some time, if at all.”

He had turned his eyes away now, and was speaking in a dreamy sort of tone. As I once heard him speak to Selina.

“They will be wanting some one to fill Mrs. Freeman’s place, will they not?”

“I cannot say, I’m sure, sir. The family do not talk of their affairs before me.”

“Who is staying at Chandos now?” he abruptly asked.

“Only the family.”

“Ah! the family—of course. I mean what members of it.”

“All; except Madame de Mellissie and Sir Thomas Chandos.”

“That is, there are Lady Chandos, her son, and daughter-in-law. That comprises the whole, I suppose—except you.”

“Yes, it does. But I must really beg you to allow me to pass, sir.”

“You are welcome now, and I am going to turn, myself. It is pleasant to have met an intelligent lady; and I hope we often shall meet,

that I may hear good tidings of my friends at Chandos. I was intimate with part of the family once, but a coolness arose between us, and I do not go there. Good day."

He turned and walked rapidly back. I struck into the nearest side walk I could find that would bring me to the open grounds, and nearly struck against Mr. Chandos.

"Are you alone, Miss Hereford? I surely heard voices."

"A gentleman met me, sir, and spoke."

"A gentleman—in this remote part of the grounds!" he repeated, looking keenly at me, as a severe expression passed momentarily across his face. "Was it any one you knew?"

"It was he who came into the broad walk, and whom you ordered out—the new tenant. He is gone now."

"He! I fancied so," returned Mr. Chandos, the angry flush deepening. And it seemed almost as though he were angry with me.

"I found out the walk by accident, sir, and I met him in it. He stopped and accosted me

with several questions, which I thought very rude of him."

"What did he ask you?"

"He wished to know my name, who I was, and what I was doing at Chandos ; but I did not satisfy him. He then inquired about the family, asking what members of it were at home."

"And you told him?"

"There was no need to tell him, sir, for he mentioned the names to me ; yourself, Lady, and Mrs. Chandos."

"Ethel ! he mentioned her, did he ! What did he call her ?—Mrs. Chandos?"

"He did not mention her by name, sir ; he said 'daughter-in-law.' I did not tell Mr. Chandos that the designation made an impression upon me, establishing the supposition that Mrs. Chandos *was* a daughter-in-law.

"And pray what did he call me?"

"Harry Chandos."

"Well, now mark me, Miss Hereford. That man accosted you to worm out what he could of our every-day life at home. His name is Barley—Edwin Barley. He is a bitter enemy of ours,

and if he could pick up any scrap of news or trifle of fact that he could by possibility turn about and work so as to injure us, he would do it."

"But how could he, sir?" I exclaimed, not understanding.

"His suspicions are no doubt aroused that—that—I beg your pardon, Miss Hereford," he abruptly broke off, with the air of one who has said more than he meant to say. "These matters cannot interest you. You—you did not tell Mr. Barley what I imparted to you this morning, touching myself?"

"Oh, Mr. Chandos, how can you ask the question? Did I not promise you to hold it sacred?"

"Forgive me," he gently said. "Nay, I am sorry to have pained you."

He had pained me in no slight degree, and the tears very nearly rose in my eyes. I would rather be beaten with rods than have my good faith slighted. I think Mr. Chandos saw something of this in my face.

"Believe me, I do not doubt you for a

moment ; but Edwin Barley, in all that regards our family, is cunning and crafty. Be upon your guard, should he stop you again, not to betray aught of our affairs at Chandos, the little daily occurrences of home life. A chance word, to all appearance innocent and trifling, might work incalculable mischief to us, even ruin. Will you remember this, Miss Hereford ?”

I promised him I would, and went back to the house, he continuing his way. At the end of the privet-walk a gate led to the open country, and I supposed Mr. Chandos had business there. As I reached the portico a gentleman was standing there with the butler, asking to see Lady Chandos. It was Mr. Jarvis, the curate.

“ My lady is sick in bed, sir,” was Hickens’s reply, his long, grave face giving ample token that he held belief in his own words.

“ I am sorry to hear that. Is her illness serious ?”

“ Rather so, sir, I believe. Mrs. Hill fears it will be days before her ladyship is down stairs. She used to be subject to dreadful bilious attacks ; I suppose it’s one of them come back again.”

The curate gave in a card, left a message, and departed. So it appeared that Hill was regaling the servants with the same story that she had told me. I could have spoken up, had I dared, and said there was nothing the matter with the health of Lady Chandos.

At six o'clock I went down to dinner, wondering who would preside. I have said that no ceremony was observed at Chandos, the every-day life was simple in the extreme. Since the departure of Emily de Mellissie we had sat in the oak-parlour, and all the meals were taken there. In fact, there was nobody to sit but myself. Lady Chandos had been mostly in the west wing ; Mr. Chandos out, or in his study ; Mrs. Chandos I never saw. The servants were placing the soup on the table. In another moment Mr. Chandos came in.

“A small company this evening, Miss Hereford ; only you and I,” he laughed, as we took our seats.

“Is Lady Chandos not sufficiently well to dine, sir ?” I asked.

“She will eat something, no doubt. Hill takes

care of her mistress. I met her carrying up the tray as I came down."

"I hope I am not the cause of your dining down stairs," I rejoined, the unpleasant thought striking me that it might be so. "Perhaps, but for me, you would take your dinner with Lady Chandos?"

"Nothing of the sort, I assure you. Were it not for you, I should sit here in solitary state, and eat my lonely dinner with what appetite I might. And a solitary dinner is not good for the digestion, the doctors tell us. Did any one call while I was out, Hickens?"

"Only Mr. Jarvis, sir. I think he wanted to see my lady about the new schools. He was very particular in asking what was the matter with her, and I said I thought it might be one of those old bilious attacks come on again. My lady had a bad one or two at times, years ago, sir, you may remember."

"Ay," replied Mr. Chandos: but it was all the comment he made.

"Is Lady Chandos subject to bilious attacks?" I inquired of Mr. Chandos.

"Not particularly. She has been free from them latterly."

"Did you know, sir," continued Hickens, "that we have had news of Mrs. Freeman?"

"No. When did it come? I hope it's good."

"Not very good, sir. It came half-an-hour ago. She had another fit to-day in the forenoon, and it's certain now that she won't be able to come back here for a long while, if she is at all. The relation that she is with wrote to Mrs. Hill, who took up the note to my lady. Hill says, when she left her there were symptoms of a second attack coming on."

Mr. Chandos leaned back for a moment in his chair, forgetful that he was at dinner, and not alone. He was in a reverie; but, as his eye fell on me, he shook it off, and spoke.

"Her not returning will prove an inconvenience to Mrs. Chandos."

"I am afraid it will, sir," rejoined Hickens, who had fancied himself addressed; though, in point of fact, Mr. Chandos had but unconsciously spoken aloud his thoughts. Hickens had been a

long while in the family, was a faithful and valued servant, consequently he thought himself at liberty to talk in season and out of season. "I warned Mrs. Chandos's maid, sir, not to tell her mistress about Mrs. Freeman's being worse," he went on. "It would do no good, and only worrit her."

Mr. Chandos slightly nodded, and the dinner then proceeded in silence. At its conclusion, Mr. Chandos, after taking one glass of wine, rose.

"I must apologize for leaving you alone, Miss Hereford, but I believe my mother will expect me to sit with her. Be sure you make yourself at home; and ring for tea when you wish for it."

"Shall you not be in to tea, sir?"

"I think not. At all events, don't wait."

Dreary enough was it for me, sitting in that great solitary room—not solitary in itself, but from want of tenants.

I went and stood at the window. The wax-lights were burning, but nothing but the muslin curtains was before the windows. There was no one to overlook the room; comers to the

house did not pass it ; the servants had no business whatever in the front ; and very often the shutters were not closed until bedtime. It was scarcely yet to be called dark : the atmosphere was calm and clear, and a bright white light came from the west. Putting on a shawl, I went quietly out.

It was nearly, for me, as dreary out-of-doors as in. All seemed still ; no soul was about ; no voices were to be heard ; no cheering lights gleamed from the windows. I was daring enough to walk to the end and look up at the west wing ; a slight glimmering, as of fire, sparkled up now and again in what I had understood was Lady Chandos's sitting-room. Back to the east wing, and looked at the end of that. Plenty of cheerful blaze there, both of fire and candle ; and, once, the slight form of Mrs. Chandos appeared for a minute at the window, looking out.

I passed on to the back of the house, by the servants' ordinary path, round the east wing. It was a good opportunity for seeing what the place was like. But I did not bargain for the great

flood of light into which I was thrown on turning the angle. It proceeded from the corner room ; the windows were thrown wide open, and some maid-servants were ironing at a long board underneath. Not caring that they should see me, I drew under the cover of a projecting shed, that I believe belonged to the brewhouse, and took a leisurely survey. Plenty of life here ; plenty of buildings ; it seemed like a colony. Lights shone from several windows of the long edifice—as long as it was in front. The entrance was in the middle ; a poultry-yard lay at the other end ; a pasture for cows opposite ; the range of stables could be seen in the distance.

Harriet and Emma were the two maids ironing ; Lizzy Dene, a very dark young woman of thirty, with a bunch of wild-looking black curls on either side her face, sat by the ironing-stove, doing nothing. Why they added her surname, Dene, to her Christian name in speaking of her, I did not know, but it seemed to be the usual custom. These three, it may be remembered, have been mentioned as the housemaids. Another woman, whom I did not recognise, but

knew her later for the laundry-maid, was at the back, folding clothes. They were talking fast, but very distinctly, in that half-covert tone which betrays the subject to be a forbidden one. The conversation and the stove's heat were alike wafted to me through the open window.

“ You may preach from now until to-morrow morning,” were the first words I heard, and they came from Harriet; “ but you will never make me believe that people's ghosts can appear before they die. It is not in nature's order.”

“ *His* appears. I'll stand to that. And what's more, I'll stand to it that I saw it last night !” cried Lizzy Dene, looking up and speaking in strong, fierce jerks, as she was in the habit of doing. “ I sat up in the bedroom sewing. It's that new black silk polka of mine that I wanted to finish, and if I got it about downstairs, Madam Hill would go on above a bit about finery. Emma got into bed and lay awake talking, her and me. Before I'd done, my piece of candle came to an end, and I thought I'd go into Harriet's room and borrow hers. It was a lovely night, the moon shone slantways in at the

turret window, and something took me that I'd have a look out. So I went up the turret stairs and stood at the casement. I'd not been there a minute before I saw it—the living image of Mr. Chandos!—and I thought I should have swooned away. Ask Emma."

"Well, I say it might have been Mr. Chandos himself, but it never was his ghost," argued Harriet.

"You might be a soft, but I dare say you'd stand to it you are not," retorted Lizzy. "Don't I tell you that in the old days we saw that apparition when Mr. Harry was safe in his bed? When we knew him to be in his bed with that attack of fever he had? I saw it twice then with my own eyes. And once, when Mr. Harry was miles and miles away—gone over to that French place where Miss Emily was at school—it came again. Half the household saw it; and a fine commotion there was! Don't tell me, girl! I've lived in the family seven years. I came here before old Sir Thomas died."

There was a pause. Harriet, evidently not discomfited, whisked away her iron to the stove,

changed it, and came back again before she spoke.

“ I don’t know anything about back times ; the present ones is enough for me. Did you see this, Emma, last night ?”

“ Yes, I did,” replied Emma, who was a silent and rather stupid-looking girl, with a very retreating chin. “ Lizzy Dene came rushing back into the room, saying the ghost had come again, and I ran after her up to the turret window. Something was there, safe enough.”

“ Who was it like ?”

“ Mr. Chandos. There was no mistaking him : one does not see a tall, thin, upright man like him every day. There was his face, too, and his beautiful features quite plain ; the moon gave a light like day.”

“ It was himself, as I said,” coolly contended Harriet.

“ It was not,” said Lizzy. “ Mr. Chandos would no more have been dancing in and out of the trees in that fashion, like a jack-in-the-box, than he’d try to fly in the air. It was the ghost at its tricks again.”

"But the thing is incredible," persisted Harriet. "Let us suppose, for argument's sake, that it is Mr. Chandos's ghost that walks, what does it come for, Lizzy Dene?"

"I never heard that ghosts stooped to explain their motives. How should we know why it comes?"

"And I never heard yet that ghosts of live people came at all," continued Harriet, in recrimination. "And I don't think anybody else ever did."

"But you know that's only your ignorance, Harriet. Certain people are born into the world with their own fetches or wraiths, which appear sometimes with them, sometimes at a distance, and Mr. Chandos must be one. I knew a lady's maid of that kind. While she was with her mistress in Scotland, her fetch used to walk about in England, startling acquaintances into fits. Some people call 'em doubles."

"But what's the use of them?" reiterated Harriet; "what do they do? That's what I want to know."

"Harriet, don't you be profane, and set up

your back against spirituous things," rebuked Lizzy Dene. "There was a man in our village, over beyond Marden, that never could be brought to reverence such ; he mocked at 'em like any heathen, saying he'd fight single-handed the best ten ghosts that ever walked, for ten pound a side, and wished he could get the chance. What was the awful consequences ? Why that man, going home one night from the beer-shop, marched right into the canal in mistake for his own house-door, and was drownded."

Emma replenished the stove, took a fresh iron, singed a rag in rubbing it, and continued her work. The woman, folding clothes at the back, turned round to speak.

"How was the notion first taken up—that it was Mr. Chandos's fetch?"

"This way," said Lizzy Dene, who appeared from her longer period of service in the family to know more than the rest. "It was about the time of Sir Thomas's death ; just before it, or after it, I forget which now. Mr. Harry—as he was mostly called when he was younger—was ill with that low fever ; it was said something had

worried him and brought the sickness on. My lady by token, was poorly at the same time, and kept her rooms ; and, now that I remember, Sir Thomas *was* dead, for she wore her widow's caps. At the very time Mr. Harry was in his bed, this figure, his very self, was seen at night in the grounds. That was the first of it."

" If there's one thing more deceptive than another, it's night-light," meekly observed the woman.

" The next time was about two years after that," resumed Lizzy, ignoring the suggestion. " Mr. Harry was in France, and one of the servants stopped out late one evening without leave : Phœby it was, who's married now. She had missed the train and had to walk, and it was between twelve and one when she got in, and me and Ann sitting up for her in a desperate fright lest Mrs. Hill should find it out. In she came, all in a flutter, saying Mr. Harry was in the pinc-walk, which she had come across, as being the nearest way, and she was afraid he had seen her. Of course, we thought it was Mr. Harry come home, and that the house would be called up to

serve refreshments for him. But nothing happened ; no bells were rung, and to bed we went. The next morning we found he had not come home, and finely laughed at Phœby, asking her what she had taken to obscure her eyesight—which made her very mad. Evening came, and one of them telegraph messages came over the sea to my lady from Mr. Harry, proving he was in the French town. But law ! that night, there he was in the dark pine-path again, walking up and down it, and all us maids sat up and saw him. My lady was ill again then, I remember ; she does have bad bouts now and then.”

“ Do you mean to say you all saw him ? ” questioned Harriet.

“ We all saw him, four or five of us,” emphatically repeated Lizzy. “ Hickens came to hear of it, and called us all the simpletons he could lay his tongue to. He told Hill—leastways we never knew who did if he didn’t—and didn’t she make a commotion. If ever she heard a syllable of such rubbish from us again, she said, we should all go packing : and she locked up the turret-door, and kept the key in her pocket for weeks.”

"You see, what staggers one is that Mr. Chandos should be alive," said Harriet. "One could understand if he were dead."

"Nothing that's connected with ghosts, and those things, ought to stagger one at all," dissented Lizzy."

"According to you, Lizzy Dene, the ghost only appears by fits and starts."

"No more it does. Every two years or so. Any way it has been seen once since the time I tell you of when Mr. Chandos was abroad, which is four years ago, and now it's here again."

"One would think you watched for it, Lizzy!"

"And so I do. Often of a moonlight night, I get out of bed and go to that turret-window."

Some one came quickly down the path at this juncture, brushing by me as I stood in the shade. It was the still-room maid. She had a bundle in her hand, went on to the entrance, and thence came into the ironing-room. Hill followed her in; but the latter remained at the back, looking at some ironed laces on a table, and not one of the girls noticed her presence. The still-room maid advanced to the ironing-board,

let her bundle fall on it, and threw up her arms in some excitement.

“ I say, you know Mrs. Peters, over at the brook ! Well—she’s dead.”

“ Dead !” echoed the girls, pausing in their work. “ Why it was not a week ago that she was here.”

“ She’s dead. They were laying her out when I came by just now. Some fever, they say, which took her off in no time ; a catching fever, too. A mortal fright it put me in, to hear that ; I shouldn’t like to die yet awhile.”

“ If fever has broke out in the place, who knows but it’s fever that has taken my lady !” exclaimed Emma, her stupid face alive with consternation : and the rest let their irons drop on their stands. “ All our lives may be in jeopardy.”

“ Your places will be in greater jeopardy if you don’t pay a little more attention to work, and leave off talking nonsense,” called out the sharp voice of Mrs. Hill from the background. The servants started round at its sound, and the irons were taken up again.

CHAPTER VI.

DISTURBED BY MRS. CHANDOS.

No candles yet in Lady Chandos's rooms, but a great flood of light in those of Mrs. Chandos. The commotion in the ironing-room, that followed on the discovered presence of Hill, had given me the opportunity to come away, and so exchange (not willingly) the gossiping cheerfulness of the back, for the dreary front of the house. I had nearly laughed aloud at those foolish servant girls ; nevertheless, in what they had said there was food for speculation. For when Harry Chandos was a-bed, sick with fever ; when he was over in France, with the broad sea and many miles of land between him and his home ; how could they have seen him, or fancied they saw him, in these dark walks, night after night, at Chandos ?

Pacing the dark gravel walk from wing to wing, glancing, as I passed each time, through

the window-panes and the muslin curtains into the oak-parlour, where the solitary tea waited, I thought over it all, and came to the conclusion that, taking one curious thing with another, something was uncanny in the place. How long should I have to stay at it?—how long would it be before Emily de Mellissie came back to me?

The hall-door stood open, and the hall-lamp threw its light across the lawn in a straight line. It seemed like a ray of company amid the general dreariness. I took a fancy to walk along the pleasant stream, forgetting or unheeding the dew that might lie on the grass. On reaching the other side, I stood a moment at the top of the pine-walk, and then advanced a few steps down it.

Some one was there before me. A white figure—as it looked—was flitting about; and I gave a great start. What with the night-hour, the solitary loneliness of all around, the soft sighing sound from the branches of the trees, and the servant-girls' recent talk of the "ghost," I am not sure but I began to think of ghosts myself. Ghost, or no ghost, it came gliding up

to me, with its slender form, its lovely face: Mrs. Chandos, in a white silk evening-dress, with a small white opera-cloak on her shoulders. It was her pleasure, as I learnt later, to dress each day for her own lonely society just as she would for a state dinner-table.

“How you startled me!” she exclaimed. “With that great brown shawl on your head, you look as much like a man as a woman. But I saw by the height it was not *he*. Did you know that he came—that he was here last night?” she added, dropping her voice to the faintest whisper.

It was the first time Mrs. Chandos had voluntarily addressed me. Of course I guessed that she alluded to Mr. Harry Chandos: but I hesitated to answer, after the caution he had given me. Was there anything *wild* about her voice and manner as she spoke?—had her spirits run away with her to-night?—or did the fact of her flitting about in the white evening-dress in this wild way, like any school-girl, cause me to fancy it?

“Did you know it, I ask?” she impatiently rejoined. “Surely you may answer *me*.”

“Yes!” There seemed no help for it. “I saw him, madam, but I shall not mention it. The secret is safe with me.”

“You saw him! Oh, heaven, what will be done?” she cried, in evident distress. “It was so once before: the servants saw him. You must not tell any one; you must not.”

“Indeed I will not. I am quite trustworthy.”

“What are you doing out here?” she sharply said. “Looking for him?”

“Indeed no. I was dull by myself, and came across unthinkingly. I am as true as you, Mrs. Chandos. I would not, for the world, say a word to harm him.”

The assurance seemed to satisfy—to calm her; she grew quiet as a little child.

“To talk of it might cause grievous evil, you know; it might lead to—but I had better not say more to a stranger. How did you come to know of it?”

I made no answer. Some feeling, that I did not stay to sift, forbade me to say it was from himself.

“I know; it was from Madame de Mellissie.

It was very foolish of her to tell you. It was wrong of her to bring you here at all."

As Mrs. Chandos spoke, there was something in her words, in her tone, in her manner altogether, that caused a worse idea to flash across me—that she was not quite herself. Not insane ; it was not that thought ; but a little wanting in intellect ; as if the powers of mind were impaired. It startled me beyond measure, and I began to think that I ought to try and get her indoors.

" Shall you not take cold out here, Mrs. Chandos ?"

" I never take cold. You see, I am my own mistress now : when Mrs. Freeman's here, she will never let me come out after dusk. Lady Chandos sent my maid to sit with me this evening, but I lay down on the sofa, and told her I was perhaps going to sleep and she could not stay with me. And I came out ; I thought I might see *him*."

Every word she spoke added to the impression.

" And so you saw him last night ! I did not ; I never do. The windows looking this way are

closed. And perhaps if I were to see him like that, and be taken by surprise, it might make me ill: Mrs. Freeman says it would. It is so sad, you know!"

"Very sad," I murmured, assuming still that she alluded to the infirmity of Mr. Chandos.

"They never told me. They are not aware that I know it. I found it out to-day. I was going about the gallery early this morning, before Hill came home, and I found it out. When Mrs. Freeman's here, I can only get out when she pleases. You cannot think what a long time it is since—since——"

"Since what?" I asked, as she came to a stop.

"Since the last time. Harry has not said a word to me all day; it is a shame of him. He ought to have told *me*."

"Yes, yes," I murmured, wishing to soothe her.

"You see, Harry's not friends with me. He tells me he is, but he is not in reality. It is through my having treated him badly: he has been the same as a stranger ever since. But he

ought to have told me this. You must not tell them that I know it."

"Certainly not."

"They might lock me in, you know ; they did once before : but that was not the last time, it was when Harry was in France. If Mrs. Freeman had been here to-day, I should not have known it so soon. It is very cruel : I think I shall tell Lady Chandos so. If Harry——"

During the last few words, Mrs Chandos's eyes had been strained on a particular spot near to us. What she saw, or fancied she saw, I know not, but she broke into a low smothered cry of fear, and sped away swiftly to the house. Rather startled, I bent my eyes on the place, as if by some fascination, half expecting—how foolish it was !—to see Mr. Chandos perambulating in his sleep. And I believe, had I done so, I should have run away more terrified than from any ghost.

Something did appear to be there that ought not. It was between the trunks of two trees, in a line with them, as if it were another tree of never-yet-witnessed form and shape. A vast deal

more like the figure of a man, thought I, as I gazed. Not a tall slender man like Mr. Chandos; more of the build of Mr. Edwin Barley.

Why the idea of the latter should have occurred to me, or whether the man (it certainly was one !) bore him any resemblance, I could not tell. The fancy was quite enough for me, and I sped away as quickly as Mrs. Chandos had done. She had whisked silently through the hall towards her rooms, and met her maid on the stairs ; who had probably just discovered her absence.

“ Are you ready to make tea, Miss Hereford ? I have come to have some.”

It was the greeting of Mr. Chandos, as I ran scared and breathless, into the oak-parlour. He was sitting in the easy-chair near the table, a review in his hand, and looked up with surprise. No wonder—seeing me dart in as if pursued by a wild cat, an ugly shawl over my head. But, you see, I had not thought he would be there.

However, he said nothing. I sat down, as sedate as any old matron, and made the tea. Mr. Chandos read his paper, and spoke to me between whiles.

“Don’t you think, sir, we ought to have heard to-day from Madame de Mellissie?”

“Why to-day?”

“It is getting time that I heard. Except the short note to Lady Chandos, written upon her arrival in Paris, she has not sent a syllable. It is very strange.”

“Nothing is strange that Emily does. She may be intending to surprise us by arriving without notice. I fully expect it. On the other hand, we may not hear from her for weeks to come.”

“But she has left me here, sir! She said she should be sure to come back the very first day she could.”

Mr. Chandos slightly laughed. “You may have passed from her memory, Miss Hereford, as completely as though you never existed in it.”

I paused in consternation, the suggestion bringing to me I know not what of perplexity. He looked excessively amused.

“What can I do, sir?”

“Not anything that I see, except make your-

self contented here. At least until we hear from Emily."

With the tea-things, disappeared Mr. Chandos; and a sensation of loneliness fell upon me. At what? At his exit, or at my previous alarm in the pine-walk? I might have asked myself, but did not. He came back again shortly, remarking that it was a fine night.

"Have you been out, sir?"

"No. I have been to my mother's rooms."

"Is she better this evening?"

"Much the same."

He stood with his elbow on the mantel-piece, his hand lifted to his head, evidently in deep thought, a strange look of anxiety, of pain, in the expression of his countenance. I went over to a side table to get something out of my work-box; and, not to disturb him by going back again, I softly pulled aside the muslin window-curtain to look out for a minute on the dusky, still night.

What was it made me spring back with a sudden movement of terror and a half cry? Surely I could not be mistaken! That *was* a face

close to the window, looking in ; the dark face of a man ; and, unless I was much mistaken, bearing a strong resemblance to that of Mr. Edwin Barley.

“ What is it ? ” asked Mr. Chandos, coming forward. “ Has anything alarmed you ? ”

“ Oh, sir ! I saw a face pressed close to the window-pane. A man’s face.”

Without the loss of a moment, Mr. Chandos threw up the window, and had his head out. All I felt good for was to sit down in a chair out of sight. He could see no one, as it appeared, and he shut the window again very quietly. Perhaps his thoughts only pointed to some one of the servants.

“ Are you sure you saw any one, Miss Hereford ? ”

“ I am very nearly sure, sir.”

“ Who was it ? ”

In truth I could not say, and I was not obliged to avow my suspicions. Mr. Chandos hastened outside, and I remained alone, as timid as could be.

A curious and most unpleasant suspicion was

fixing itself upon my mind, dim glimpses of which had been haunting me during tea—that Mr. Edwin Barley's object was me. That it was himself who had been in the pine-walk, and again now at the window, I felt a positive conviction. He must have recognised me; this stealthy intrusion at odd times, seasonable and unseasonable, must be to watch me, to take note of my movements, not of those of the owners of Chandos. But for his motive I searched in vain.

“I cannot see or hear any one about,” said Mr. Chandos, when he returned; “all seems to be quite free and still. I fancy you must have been mistaken, Miss Hereford.”

I shook my head, but did not care to say much, after the notion that had taken possession of me. Words might lead to deeper questions, and I could not for the world have said that I knew Edwin Barley.

“Possibly you may be a little nervous to-night,” he continued, ringing the bell; “and at such times the fancy considers itself at liberty to play us all sorts of tricks. My having told you

what I did this morning relating to myself, may have taken hold of your imagination."

"Oh, no ; it has not."

"I shall be very sorry to have mentioned it, if it has. Believe me, there's nothing in that to disturb you. When you ran in at tea-time I thought you looked scared. Close the shutters," he added, to the servant, who had appeared in answer to his ring. "And if you will pardon my leaving you alone, Miss Hereford, I will wish you good night. I am very tired, and I have some writing to do yet."

He shook hands with me and departed. Joseph bolted and barred the shutters, and I was left alone. But I went up to my room before ten o'clock.

Would Mr. Chandos—or his ghost, as the servants had it—be out again that night in his somnambulant state? The subject had taken hold of my most vivid interest, and after undressing I undid the shutters and stood for a few minutes at the window in a warm wrapper, watching the grounds. Eyes and ears were alike strained, but to no purpose. No noise disturbed the house

indoors, and all appeared still without. It might be too early yet for Mr. Chandos.

But the silence told upon me. There was not a voice to be heard, not a sound to break the intense stillness. I began to feel nervous, hurried into bed, and went to sleep.

Not to sleep for very long. I was awakened suddenly by a commotion in the gallery outside. A loud, angry cry ; reproachful tones ; all in the voice of Mrs. Chandos ; they were followed by low, remonstrating words, as if somebody wished to soothe her. Were you ever aroused thus in the middle of the night in a strange, or comparatively strange, place ? If so, you may divine what was my terror. I sat up in bed with parted lips, unable to hear anything distinctly for the violent beating of my heart ; and then darted to the door, putting on my slippers and my large warm wrapper, before drawing it cautiously an inch open.

It was not possible to make out anything at first in the dim gallery. Three dusky forms were there, having apparently come from the west wing, which I took to be those of Lady, Mr., and Mrs. Chandos. She, the latter, had her hair

hanging down over a white wrapper; and Mr. Chandos, his arm about her waist, was drawing her to her own apartments. It was by that I knew him; who else would have presumed so to touch her?—his coat was off, his slippers were noiseless. The moonlight, coming in faintly on the gallery from above, made things tolerably clear, as my eyes got used to them.

“ You never would have told me,” she sobbed, pushing back her hair with a petulant hand; “ you know you never meant to tell me for ever so long. It is cruel—cruel! What am I here but a caged bird?”

“ Oh, Ethel! Ethel! you will betray us all!” cried Lady Chandos, in a voice of dire, reproachful tribulation. “ To think that you should make this disturbance at night! Did you forget that a stranger was sleeping here?—that the servants may hear you in their rooms? You will bring desolation on the house.”

Scarcely had they disappeared within the doors of the east wing, when Mr. Chandos came swiftly and suddenly out of his own chamber. Only a moment seemed to have elapsed, yet he hal

found it sufficient time to finish dressing, for he was now fully attired. His appearing from his chamber, after disappearing within the east wing, established the fact that his room did communicate with it. Almost simultaneously Hickens ran up the stairs from the hall, a light in his hand. Mr. Chandos advanced upon him, and peremptorily waved him back.

“ Go back to bed, sir. You are not wanted.”

But as the light fell on Mr. Chandos’s face, I saw that he was deadly pale, and his imperative manner seemed to proceed from fear, not anger.

“ I heard a scream, Mr. Harry,” responded poor Hickens, evidently taken to. “ I’m sure I heard voices ; and I—I—thought some thieves or villains of that sort had got in, sir.”

“ Nothing of the kind. There’s nothing whatever the matter to call for your aid. Mrs. Chandos is nervous to-night, and cried out—it is not the first time it has happened, as you know. She is all right again now, and my mother is with her. Go back, and get your rest as usual.”

“ Shall I leave you the light, sir ?” asked

Hickens, perceiving that Mr. Chandos had none.

“Light? No. What do I want with a light? Mrs. Chandos’s ailments have nothing to do with me.”

He stood at the head of the stairs, watching Hickens down, and listening to his quiet closing of the doors dividing the hall from the kitchen-passages. Hickens slept down stairs, near his plate-pantry. He was late in going to rest, as it was explained afterwards, and had heard the noise over-head in the midst of undressing.

Mr. Chandos turned from the stairs, and I suppose the slender inch-stream of moonlight must have betrayed to him that my door was open. He came straight towards it with his stern, white face, and I had no time to draw back. He and ceremony were at variance that night.

“Miss Hereford, I beg your pardon, but I must request that you retire within your room and allow your door to be closed,” came the peremptory injunction. “Mrs. Chandos is ill, and the sight of strangers would make her worse.

I will close it for you ; I should so act by my sister, were she here."

He shut it with his own hand, and turned the key upon me. Turned the key upon me ! Well, I could only submit, feeling very much ashamed to have had my curiosity observed, and scuttled into bed. Nothing more was heard ; not the faintest movement to tell that anything unusual had happened.

But how strangely mysterious it all appeared ! One curious commotion, one unaccountable mystery succeeding to another. I had heard of haunted castles in romances, of ghostly abbeys ; surely the events enacted in them could not be more startling than these at Chandos.

Morning came. I was up betimes ; dressed, read ; found my room unlocked, and went out of doors while waiting for breakfast. Mr. Chandos passed on his way from the house, and stopped.

"Did I offend you last night, Miss Hereford ?"

"No, sir."

"Walk with me a few steps, then," he rejoined. "I assumed the liberty of treating you as a sister—as though you were Emily. I thought

you would have the good sense to understand so, and feel no offence. What caused you to be looking from your door?"

"The commotion in the gallery awoke me, sir, and I felt frightened. It was only natural I should look to see what caused it."

"What did you see?"

"I saw Lady and Mrs. Chandos; and I saw you, sir. You were supporting Mrs. Chandos."

"Did you see any one else?"

"No; not any one else."

For the space of a full minute Mr. Chandos never took his eyes from me. It looked as if he questioned my veracity.

"I forgot Hickens, sir; I saw him. At least, in point of fact, I did not see him; he did not come high enough; I only heard him."

"Suppose I were to tell you it was not Mrs. Chandos you saw?"

"But it was Mrs. Chandos, sir; I am sure of it. I recognised her in spite of her hanging hair, and I also recognised her voice."

"You are equally sure, I presume, that it was myself?"

“Of course I am, sir. Why, did you not speak to me at my door afterwards?”

Could I have been mistaken in thinking that a great relief came over his face?

“Ah, yes,” he continued after a pause, while his gaze went out into the far distance, “Mrs. Chandos is one of our troubles. She is not in good health, and has disturbed us before in the same manner. The fact is, she is what is called nervous; meaning that she is not so collected at times as she ought to be. I am very sorry you were disturbed.”

“Pray don’t think anything of that, sir. She feels strange, perhaps, now Mrs. Freeman is gone.”

“Yes, that is it. But it has very much upset my mother.”

“I fancied yesterday evening that Mrs. Chandos was not quite right; though, perhaps, I ought not to repeat it. Her manner was a little wild.”

“Yesterday evening! When did you see her yesterday evening?”

“I saw her out in the grounds, sir, in the pine walk.”

“ Alone ?”

“ Quite alone, sir, in her white silk evening-dress. It was at dusk : just before I ran in to the oak-parlour, if you remember. Mrs. Chandos and I came in together.”

“ What took *you* there ?” he asked abruptly.

I told him what ;—that I had stepped out, being alone, and crossed the grass.

“ Well,” he said, gravely, “ allow me to caution you not to go out of doors after dusk, Miss Hereford ; there are reasons against it. I will take care that Mrs. Chandos does not. We might have you both run away with,” he added in a lighter tone.

“ There is no fear of that, sir.”

“ You do not know what there is fear of,” he sharply answered. “ Last night you looked as scared as could be. You will be fancying you see ghosts in the pine walk next, or me, perhaps, walking in my sleep.”

“ We thought we did, sir. At least, something was there that looked like a man.”

“ What kind of man ?” he hastily asked.

“ One short and thick. I suppose it was only the trunk of a tree.”

“ Stay indoors; don’t go roaming about at dark,” he emphatically said. “ And now I have another request to make to you, Miss Hereford.”

“ What is it, sir?”

“ That you will leave off calling me ‘ sir.’ It does not sound well on your lips.”

He smiled as he spoke. And I blushed until I was ashamed of myself.

“ Have you any love for the appellation?”

“ No, indeed! But Madame de Mellissie—”

“ Just so,” he interrupted. “ I suspected as much. You would not have fallen into it yourself.”

“ I don’t know that, sir.”

“ Sir?”

“ It was a slip of the tongue. I used to say ‘ Sir’ and ‘ Madam’ to Mr. and Mrs. Paler. I was told to do so when I went there as governess.”

“ Well, you are not governess here, and we can dispense with it. Good morning!” he added, as

we neared the gates. "It is too bad to bring you so far, and send you back alone."

"Are you not coming to breakfast, sir?"
Another slip.

"My breakfast was taken an hour ago. I am going to see how Mrs. Freeman is. You will be condemned to make a solitary breakfast this morning. Good-bye!"

A very pleasant one, for all that. It is pleasant to live amidst the luxuries of life. The fare of a governess had been exchanged for the liberal table of Chandos. Not that I cared much what I ate and drank; I was young and healthy; but I did like the ease and refinement, the state and the innocent vanities pertaining to the order of the Chandos world.

Half sitting, half lying in one of the garden-chairs in the balmy sunshine, I partly read and partly dreamed away the morning. The house was within view; servants and comers passed to it within hail; cheery voices could be heard; snatches of laughter now and again. On that side all was busy life; on the other lay the silent mass of trees that surrounded Chandos. The

sun was twinkling through their foliage ; the glorious tints of ruddy autumn lighted them up. A charming tableau !

Uncertain though my stay was, unusual and perhaps undesirable as the position was for a young girl, I was beginning to feel strangely happy in it. Madame de Mellissie did not come ; another post in, that day, and no letter from her. And there I sat on unconcerned, in my pretty lilac muslin, with the ribbons in my chestnut hair, watching the little birds as they flew about singing ; watching the gardener sweeping up his leaves at a distance ; and feeling more joyous than the morning. I ought not to have felt so, I dare say, but I did, and broke out into snatches of song as gay as the birds. Tra la la la ; tra la la la !

Mr. Chandos passed to the house with a quick step, not seeing me. He was back, then ; I followed, for it was the luncheon hour, and I was not on a sufficient footing at Chandos to keep meals waiting. Hill was in the oak-parlour, inquiring after the state of Mrs. Freeman.

“ Her state is this, Hill—that it admits no pro-

bability whatever of her returning here," said Mr. Chandos, throwing back his velveteen coat, for he was in sporting clothes. And well he looked in them! as a tall, handsome man generally does.

"There's a bother!" was Hill's retort. "Then some one else must be seen about, Mr. Harry, without loss of time."

"I suppose so. Things seem to be going tolerably cross just now."

"Cross and contrary," groaned Hill. "As they always do, I've noticed, when it's specially necessary they should go smooth. My lady was speaking about Miss White, you know, sir."

"Yes. I'll go up and speak with my mother. But I must have something to eat, Hill."

"The luncheon ought to be in," was Hill's reply. And she crossed to the bell and gave it a sharp pull.

"Have you been walking to Mrs. Freeman's?" I asked of Mr. Chandos, as he was quitting the room.

"That would be more than a twenty-mile walk, there and back," he answered, turning to speak.

“I honoured the omnibus with my company as far as the station, and then went on by train ; coming back in the same way.”

The luncheon was on the table when he descended from his mother’s rooms, and he hastily sat down to it. He was dressed differently then.

“I will not invite you to take it with me,” he observed, “for I must not sit five minutes, and can barely snatch a mouthful.”

“Are you going far?”

“Not very far ; but I wish to be home to dinner. That will do, Joseph ; you need not wait.”

“Let me wait upon you, Mr. Chandos,” I said, springing up.

“Very well. How will you begin?”

“I don’t know what to begin with. I don’t know what you want first.”

“Nor I. For I do not want anything at all just now. What have you been doing with yourself all the morning?”

“Working a little, and reading. Not Shakespeare, but a play of Goldsmith’s; ‘She Stoops to Conquer.’”

“Why, where did you pick up that?” he interrupted. “I did not know the book was about.”

“I saw it lying in the window-seat near the east wing, and dipped into it. After that, I could not put it down again—although it was not in the list of books you gave me.”

“You thought you would enjoy the mischief first, as the children do, whether the scolding came afterwards or not.”

“Ought I not to have read it?”

“You may read it again if you like. It is an excellent comedy; more entertaining, I fancy, to read than to witness, though. Did you fall in love with Tony Lumpkin?”

“Not irrevocably. Here comes your horse round, Mr. Chandos.”

“My signal for departure. And I believe I am speeding on a useless errand.”

“Is it an important one?”

“It is to inquire after a lady to replace Mrs. Freeman as companion to Mrs. Chandos. Some one my mother knows; a Miss White. Miss White was seeking for such a situation a few

months ago ; but the probabilities are that she has found one.”

A strong impulse came over me to offer to supply the place—until I should be called away by Madame de Mellissie. *Miss* White! she might be only a young person. If I could but make myself useful, it would take away the compunction I felt at having been thrust upon them at Chandos. I spoke on the impulse of the moment, blushing and timid as a school-girl. Mr. Chandos smiled, and shook his head.

“ It is not a situation that would suit you ; or you it.”

“ Is *Miss* White older than I ?”

“ A little. She is about fifty-six.”

“ Oh ! But as a temporary arrangement, sir ? —Until we have news from Madame de Mellissie. I should like to repay a tithe of the obligation I am under to Lady Chandos.”

“ A great obligation, that ! No, it could not be. We should have you and Mrs. Chandos running into the shrubberies after sleep-walkers and ghosts, as it seems you did last night. Besides,” he added, taking up his gloves and riding-whip,

“ if you became Mrs. Chandos’s companion, what should I do for mine?”

He nodded to me after he got on his horse ; a spirited animal, Black Knave by name : and rode away at a brisk canter, followed by his groom.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGER APPLICANT.

“ Is Mr. Chandos gone, do you know, miss ?”

The question came from Hill, who put her head in at the oak-parlour to make it.

“ He rode away not three minutes ago.”

“ Dear me ! My lady wanted him to call somewhere else. I suppose a note must be posted.”

“ Stay an instant, Mrs. Hill,” I said, detaining her. “ There’s a new companion wanted, is there not, for Mrs. Chandos ?”

“ Of course there is,” returned Hill. “ What of it ?”

“ Can I see Lady Chandos ?”

Hill turned hard directly, facing me resolutely.

“ Now, miss, you listen : we have had that discussion once before, and we don’t want it gone over again. So long as my lady keeps her rooms, neither you nor anybody else can be admitted to

her ; you wouldn't be if you paid for it in gold. And I'm much surprised that a young lady, calling herself a lady, should persist in pressing it."

"Hill, I am not pressing it. I only asked the question. As I cannot see Lady Chandos, will you deliver a message to her for me? If I can be of any use in taking the duties of companion to Mrs. Chandos in this temporary need, I shall be glad to be so, and will do my very best."

To see the countenance with which Hill received these words, was something comical : the open mouth, the stare of astonishment.

"*You* take the duties of companion to Mrs. Chandos!" uttered she, at length. "Bless the child ! you little know what you ask for."

"But will you mention it to Lady Chandos?"

Hill vouchsafed no answer. She cast a glance of pity on my ignorance or presumption, whichever she may have deemed it, and quietly went out of the room.

That it was perfectly useless persisting, or even thinking of the affair further, I saw, and got out my writing-desk. Not a word had come to me from Mrs. Paler, not a hint at payment ; and I

wrote a civil request that she would kindly forward me the money due.

This over, I sat, pen in hand, deliberating whether to write or not to Emily de Mellissie, when a loud ring came to the house door. One of the footmen crossed the hall to answer it.

“Is Lady Chandos at home?” I heard demanded, in a lady-like and firm voice.

“Her ladyship is at home, ma’am,” answered Joseph, “but she does not receive visitors.”

“I wish to see her.”

“She is ill, madam; not able to see any one.”

“Lady Chandos would admit me. My business is of importance. In short, I must see her.”

Joseph seemed to hesitate.

“I’ll call Mrs. Hill, and you can see her, ma’am,” he said, after a little pause. “But I feel certain you cannot be admitted to my lady.”

She was ushered by Joseph into the oak-parlour. A good-looking woman, as might be seen through her black Chantilly veil, dressed in a soft black silk gown and handsome shawl. She was of middle height, portly, and had a mass of fiery red hair, *crêpé* on the temples, and taken to the

back of her head. I rose to receive her. She bowed, but did not lift her veil; and it struck me that I had seen her somewhere before.

“ I presume that I have the honour of speaking to a Miss Chandos ?”

“ I am not Miss Chandos. Will you take a seat ?”

“ I grieve to hear that Lady Chandos is ill. Is she so ill that she cannot see me ?”

What I should have answered I scarcely know, and was relieved by the entrance of Hill. The visitor rose.

“ I have come here, some distance, to request an interview with Lady Chandos. I hear she is indisposed; but not, I trust, too much so to grant it to me.”

“ I’m sorry you should have taken the trouble,” bluntly returned Hill, who was in one of her ungracious moods. “ My lady cannot see any one.”

“ My business with her is of importance.”

“ I can’t help that. If all England came, Lady Chandos could not receive them.”

“ To whom am I speaking?—if I may inquire,” resumed the lady.

“I am Mrs. Hill. The many-years’ confidential attendant of Lady Chandos.”

“You share her entire confidence?”

“Her entire confidence, and that of the family.”

“I have heard of you. It is not every family who possesses so faithful a friend.”

“Anything you may have to say to her ladyship, whatever its nature, you can, if you please, charge me with,” resumed Hill, completely ignoring the compliment. “I do not urge it, or covet it,” she hastily added, in an uncompromising tone; “I only mention it because it is impossible that you can see Lady Chandos.”

“Mrs. Chandos requires a companion, at the present moment, to replace one who has gone away ill.”

“What of that?” returned Hill.

“I have come to offer myself for the appointment,” said the visitor, handing her card, which Hill dropped on the table without looking at. “I flatter myself I shall be found eligible.”

Hill looked surprised, and I felt so. Only a

candidate for the vacant place?—after all that circumlocution!

“Why could you not have said at first what you wanted?” was Hill’s next question, put with scant politeness. Indeed, she seemed to resent both the visit and the application as a personal affront. “I don’t think you’ll suit, madam.”

“Why do you think I shall not?”

“And we are about somebody already. Mr. Chandos is gone to inquire for her now.”

A flush, and a shade of disappointment, immediately hid under a smile, appeared on the lady’s face. I felt sorry for her. I thought perhaps she might be wanting a home.

“Mr. Chandos may not engage her,” observed the visitor.

“That’s true enough,” acknowledged Hill. “Yet she would have suited well; for she is not a stranger to the Chandos family.”

“Neither am I,” quietly replied the applicant. “My name is Penn—if you will have the goodness to look at the card—Mrs. Penn.”

“Penn? Penn?” repeated Hill, revolving the information, but paying no attention to the sug-

gestion. I don't recognise the name ; I remember nobody bearing it who is known to us."

" Neither would Lady Chandos recognise it, for personally I am unknown to her. When I said I was no stranger to the Chandos family, I meant that I was not strange to certain unpleasant events connected with it. That dreadful misfortune——"

" It's not a thing to be talked of in the light of day," shrieked Hill, putting up her hands to stop the words. " Have you not more discretion than that? Very fit, you'd be, as companion to young Mrs. Chandos!"

" Do not alarm yourself for nothing," rejoined Mrs. Penn, with soothing coolness. " I was not going to talk of it, beyond the barest allusion : and the whole world knows that the Chandos family are not as others. I would only observe that I am acquainted with everything that occurred ; all the details ; and therefore I should be more eligible than some to reside at Chandos."

" How did you learn them?" asked Hill.

" Lady Chandos had once an intimate friend —Mrs. Sackville ; who is now dead. I was at

Mrs. Sackville's when the affair happened, and became cognizant of all through her. Perhaps Lady Chandos may deem it worth while to see me, if you tell her this."

"How can she see you, when she's confined to her bed?" irritably responded Hill, who appeared fully bent upon admitting none to the presence of Lady Chandos. The very mention of it excited her anger in a most unreasonable manner, for which I could see no occasion whatever.

More talking. At its conclusion, Hill took the card up to Lady Chandos ; also the messages of the stranger ; one of which was, that she would prove a faithful friend in the event of being engaged. Hill returned presently, to inquire how Mrs. Penn heard that a companion to Mrs. Chandos was required ; that lady replied that she had heard it accidentally at Marden. She had lived but in three situations, she said : with Mrs. Sackville, Mrs. James, both of whom were dead, and at present she was with Mrs. Howard, of Marden, who would personally answer all inquiries.

Hill appeared to regard this as satisfactory. She noted the address given, and accompanied

Mrs. Penn to the portico, who declined the offer of refreshments. They spoke together for some minutes in an under-tone, and then Mrs. Penn walked away at a brisk pace, wishing, she said, to catch the omnibus that would presently pass Chandos gates on its way to the station. I put my head out at the window, and gazed after her, trying to recall, looking at her back, what I had not been able to do looking at her face. Hill's voice interrupted me.

“Is not there something rather queer about that person's looks, Miss Hereford?”

“In what way, Hill? She is good-looking.”

“Well, her face struck me as being a curious one. What bright red hair she's got!—quite scarlet!—and I have heard say that red hair is sometimes deceitful. It is her own, though: for I looked at it in the sunlight outside.”

“She puts me in mind of some one I have seen, and I cannot recollect who. It is not often you see red hair with those very light blue eyes.”

“I never saw hair so shiny-red in all my life,” returned Hill; “it looks just as if it had

been burnished. She seems straightforward and independent. We shall see what the references say, if it comes to an inquiry."

"If you and Lady Chandos would but let me try the situation, Hill! I'm sure I should suit Mrs. Chandos as well as this lady would. I am only twenty; but I have had experience one way or another."

As if the words were a signal to drive her away, Hill walked off. I wrote to Madame de Mellissie, finished a drawing, and got through the afternoon; going up to dress at half-past five.

Now that Lady Chandos was secluded, and Mr. Chandos my sole dinner companion, instinct told me that full dress was best avoided. So I put on my pretty pink barége, with its little tucker of Honiton lace at the throat, and its falling cuffs of Honiton lace at the wrists. Nothing in my hair but a bit of pink ribbon. I had not worn anything but ribbon since I came to Chandos.

The dinner waited and I waited, but Mr. Chandos did not come. I had seen a covered

tray carried up-stairs by Hickens ; at the door of the west wing Hill would relieve him of it, the invariable custom. At the special request of Lady Chandos, Hickens alone went up there ; the other men servants never. Joseph carried up the meals for Mrs. Chandos and stayed to wait on her.

“Would you like to sit down without Mr. Chandos, miss ?” Hickens came to inquire of me when half-past six o’clock had struck.

No, I did not care to do that. And the time went on again ; I wondering what was detaining him. By-and-by I went out of doors in the twilight, and strolled a little way down the open carriage drive. Surely Mr. Chandos’s prohibition could not extend to the broad public walk. It was not so pleasant an evening as the previous one ; clouds chased each other across the sky, a dim star or two struggled out, the air was troubled, and the wind was sighing and moaning in the trees.

There broke upon my ear the footsteps of a horse. I did not care that its master should see me walking there, and turned to gain the

house. But—what sort of a speed was it coming at? Why should Mr. Chandos be riding in that break-neck fashion? Little chance, in truth, that I could outstrip that! So I stepped close to the side trees, and in another moment Black Knave tore furiously by without its rider, the bridle trailing on the ground.

Mr. Chandos must have met with an accident! he might be lying in desperate need. Where could it have happened? and where was the groom who had gone out in attendance on him? I ran along at my swiftest speed, and soon saw a dark object in the distance, nearly as far as the entrance-gates. It was Mr. Chandos trying to raise himself.

“Are you hurt?” I asked, kneeling down beside him.

“Some trifling damage, I suppose. How came you here, Miss Hereford?”

“I saw the horse gallop in, and ran to see what the accident might be, sir. How did it happen?”

“Get up, child. Get up, and I will tell you.”

“Yes, sir,” I said, obeying him.

“ I was riding fast, being late, and in passing this spot, some creature—I should say ‘ devil ’ to any one but a young lady—darted out of those trees there, and threw up its hands with a noise right in front of my horse, to startle it, or to startle me. Black Knave reared bolt upright, bounded forward, and I lost my seat. I had deemed myself a first-rate horseman before to-night ; but I was sitting carelessly.”

“ Was it a man ?”

“ To the best of my belief, it was a woman. The night is dusk ; and I saw things less accurately than I might have done in a more collected moment. It was a something in a gray cloak, with a shrill voice. I wonder if you could help me up ?”

“ I will do my best.”

I stooped, and he placed his hands upon me, and raised himself. But it appeared that he could not walk : but for holding on to me, he would have fallen.

“ I believe you must let me lie on the ground again, and go and send assistance, Miss Hereford. Stay : who’s this ?”

It was one of the servants, Lizzy Dene, who had been, as was subsequently explained, on an errand to the village. She called out in dismayed astonishment when she comprehended the helpless position of Mr. Chandos.

“Now don’t lose your wits, Lizzy Dene, but see what you can do to help me,” he cried. “With you on one side, and Miss Hereford on the other, perhaps I may make a hobble of it.”

The woman put her basket down, concealing it between the trees, and Mr. Chandos laid his hand upon her shoulder, I helping him on the other side. She was full of questions, calling the horse all sorts of treacherous names. Mr. Chandos said the horse was not to blame, and gave her the explanation that he had given me.

“Sir, I’d lay a hundred guineas that it was one of those gipsy jades!” she exclaimed. “There’s a lot of them ‘camped on the common.”

“I’ll gipsy them, should it prove so,” he answered. “Miss Hereford, I am sorry to lean upon you so heavily. The order of things is being reversed. Instead of the knight supporting

the lady, the lady is bearing the weight of the knight."

"Where was your groom, sir?" I inquired.

"He went abroad with you."

"Yes, but I despatched him on an errand, and rode back alone."

"Should you know the woman again, sir?" asked Lizzy.

"I think I should know her scream. It was as shrill as a sea-gull's. Her head was enveloped in some covering that concealed her face; probably the hood of the gray cloak."

"Who's to know that it was not a man?" resumed Lizzy Dene.

"If so, he wore petticoats," said Mr. Chandos. "A seat at last!" he added, as we approached one. "I will remain here whilst you go and send two of the men."

"Can't we get you on further, sir?" said Lizzy.

"No. I have taxed your strength too much in this short distance. And my own also, through endeavouring to ease my weight to you."

In point of fact, the weight had been felt, for

the one foot seemed quite powerless. He sat down on the bench, his brow white and moist with pain, and motioned to us to go on. "I think they had better bring my mother's garden-chair," he said.

"I'll run and send it," cried Lizzy. "Miss had better stop with you, sir."

"What for?" asked Mr. Chandos.

"Look you here, sir. That woman, whoever she might have been, was trying to do you an injury; to cause you to lose your life, I should say; and the chances are that she's concealed somewhere about here still. Look at the opportunities for hiding there are here! Why a whole regiment of gipsies and murderers and thieves might be skulking amid the trees, and us none the wiser till they showed themselves out with guns and knives. That woman—which I'll be bound was a man—may be watching to come out upon you, sir, if you can be caught by yourself."

Mr. Chandos laughed, but Lizzy Dene seemed in anything but a laughing mood. "I will stay with you, sir," I said, and sat down reso-

lutely on the bench. Lizzy went off with a nod.

“Now, Miss Hereford, you and I have an account to settle,” he began, as her footsteps died away in the distance. “Why am I ‘sir’ again?”

“Lizzy Dene was present,” I answered, giving him the truth. I had not liked that she should see me familiar with him—putting myself, as it were, on a level with Mr. Chandos; and in truth the word still slipped out at odd times in my shyness. Lizzy Dene might have commented upon the omission in the household: but this I did not say. Mr. Chandos turned to look at me.

“Never mind who is present, I am not ‘sir’ to you. I beg you to recollect that, Miss Hereford. And now,” he continued, taking my hand, “how am I to thank you!”

“For what?”

“For coming and looking for me. I might have lain until morning, inhaling the benefit of the night dews; or until that graywitch had ‘come out again with a gun’ and finished me.”

The last words, a repetition of Lizzy Dene's, were spoken in joke. I laughed.

"You would soon have been found, without me, Mr. Chandos. Lizzy Dene was not many moments after me, and scores of others will be coming in before the night is over."

"I don't know about the 'scores.' But see how you destroy the romance of the thing, Miss Hereford! I wish there *was* a probability that the woman had gone into hiding in the groves of Chandos; I would soon have her hunted out of them."

"Do you suppose it was one of the gipsies?"

"I am at a loss for any supposition on the point," he replied. "I am unconscious of having given offence to any person or persons."

"Do you think you are much injured?"

"There are worse misfortunes in hospitals than the injury to my foot. I believe it to be nothing but a common sprain, although it has disabled me. The pain——"

"That's great, I am sure."

"Pretty well. I should not like you to experience it."

That it was more than pretty well, I saw, for the drops were coursing down his face. The men soon came up with the garden-chair, and Mr. Chandos sent me on.

He was laid on the sofa in the oak-parlour. Hill examined the foot and bound it up, one of the grooms having been despatched for a medical man. He arrived after dinner—which was taken in a scrambling sort of manner—a Mr. Dickenson, from the village, who was left with Mr. Chandos.

At tea time, when I went in again, things looked comfortable. The surgeon had pronounced it to be but a sprain, and Mr. Chandos was on the sofa, quietly reading, a shaded lamp at his elbow. From his conversation with Hill, I gathered that the lady he had been inquiring after, Miss White, had taken a situation at a distance, and could not come to Chandos.

“We have had another applicant after the place, Mr. Harry,” observed Hill, who was settling the cushion under his foot. And she proceeded to tell him the particulars of Mrs. Penn’s visit.

“Is she likely to suit?”

“My lady thinks so. Mr. Harry,”—dropping

her voice to a whisper, which she, no doubt, thought would be inaudible to me, busy with the tea-cups at the table ever so far off—"she knows all about that past trouble."

Mr. Chandos laid down his book and looked at her.

"Every unhappy syllable of it, sir; more than my lady knows herself," whispered Hill. "She mentioned one or two particulars to me which I'm sure we had never known; and she said she could tell my lady more than that."

"That is extraordinary," observed Mr. Chandos, in the same subdued tone. "Who is this Mrs. Penn. Whence could she have heard anything?"

"From Mrs. Sackville. You must remember her, sir. She stayed a week with us about that time."

"This comes of my mother's having made a confidant of Mrs. Sackville!" he muttered. "I always thought Mrs. Sackville a chattering woman. But it does not account for Mrs. Penn's knowing the particulars that my mother does not know," he added, after a pause. "I shall be curious to see Mrs. Penn."

“That’s just the question I put to her, sir : where Mrs. Sackville could have learnt these details. Mrs. Penn answered that she had them from Sir Thomas himself. Therefore, I conclude Sir Thomas must have revealed to her what he spared my lady.”

Mr. Chandos shook his head with a proud, repellent air.

“I don’t believe it, Hill. However Mrs. Sackville might have learnt them, rely upon it it was not from Sir Thomas. She was no favourite of his.”

“Misfortunes never come singly,” resumed Hill, quitting the subject with a sort of grunt. “Mrs. Freeman could not have fallen ill at a worse time.”

“And now I am disabled ! Temporarily, at least.”

“Oh, well, sir, let’s hope for the best,” cried she, getting up from her knees. “When troubles come, the only plan is to look them steadily in the face, and meet them bravely.”

“It is rather curious, though,” cried Mr. Chandos, looking at Hill.

“What is, sir?”

“That I should be laid aside now. It has been so each time. There’s something more than chance in it.”

Hill appeared to understand. I did not. As she was quitting the room, Hickens came in.

“Mr. Dexter has called, sir,” he said. “Would you like to see him?”

“Does he want anything particular?” asked Mr. Chandos.

“No business, sir. He heard of this accident to you, and hurried here,” he says.

“Let him come in. You need not leave us, Miss Hereford,” he added to me, for I was rising. “Dexter will thank you for a cup of tea.”

“Well now, Mr. Chandos, how was this?” cried the agent, as he hustled in, wiping his red face. Mr. Dexter gave me the idea of being always in a hurry.

“I can hardly tell you,” replied Mr. Chandos. “I don’t quite know myself.”

“News was brought into my office that Mr. Chandos’s horse had thrown him, and he was supposed to be dying. So I caught up my hat

and came rushing off. Hickens says it is only an injury to the ankle.”

“ And that’s enough, Dexter, for it is keeping me a prisoner. However, it might have been as you heard, so I must not grumble. The question is, what ill-working jade caused it ?”

“ Ill-working jade ?” repeated Mr. Dexter. “ Was it not an accident ? I don’t understand.”

“ An accident maliciously perpetrated. Some venomous spirit in the guise of a woman sprang before my horse with a shouting scream, and threw up her arms in his face. Black Knave won’t stand such jokes. I was riding carelessly, and lost my seat.”

“ Bless my heart !” exclaimed Mr. Dexter, after a pause given to digest the words. “ Who was it ? Is she taken ?”

“ A tramp, probably. Though why she should set on me I am unable to conjecture. Where she vanished to, or what became of her, I know not. I raised myself on my elbow directly I could collect my wits, which I assure you were somewhat scattered, but the coast was already

clear: and I had not been down a minute then."

"What was the woman like?" pursued the agent, as I handed him some tea.

"I can tell you nothing of that. She wore a gray cloak, or something that looked like one, which enveloped her person and shaded her face. I should not know her if she stood before me this minute."

"Was the cloak assumed for the purpose of disguise, sir, think you?" eagerly questioned the agent, who seemed to take the matter up with much warmth, as if he had a suspicion.

"It looked uncommonly like it."

"Then I tell you what, Mr. Chandos; it was no ordinary tramp, or jail-bird of that description. Depend upon it, you must look nearer home."

"Nearer home!" repeated Mr. Chandos.

"Do you allude to our household servants?"

"I don't allude to any party or parties in particular, sir. But when a disguise is assumed for the purpose of molesting a gentleman, riding to his home in the dusk of night, be assured that

the offender is no stranger. This ought to be investigated, Mr. Chandos."

"I sent two of the men to seek round about, and they scoured the plantations near the spot, but without result. So far as they could ascertain, no live body, worse than a hare, was concealed there."

"I could understand if you were obnoxious to the tenants, or to any others, in the neighbourhood, but the exact contrary is the case," pursued Mr. Dexter, stirring his tea violently round and round. "The tenants often say they wish Mr. Chandos was their real landlord. Not that they have any cause of complaint against Sir Thomas; but Sir Thomas is a stranger to them, and you, sir, are in their midst; one, as it were, of themselves."

"Talking about tenants—and to leave an unprofitable subject, for we shall make nothing of it in the present stage of the affair," resumed Mr. Chandos—"I don't like the new tenant by the gates here, Dexter."

"No? Why not, sir?"

"And I should like to get rid of him."

Our visitor put his bread-and-butter down on the plate, and stared at Mr. Chandos, as if questioning whether he might be in jest or earnest.

“What is your objection to him, sir?” he asked, after a pause.

“I cannot state any objection in detail. I have seen the man, and I don’t like him. How can he be got rid of, Dexter?”

“He cannot be got rid of at all, sir, until the lease is out—three years—unless he chooses to quit of his own accord. There’s a clause in the lease that he can leave at the end of any twelve-month, by giving proper notice.

“That’s his side—as regards the agreement. What is mine?”

“You have no power to dismiss him until the three years are up.”

“How came you to draw up a one-sided deed, such as that?”

“Haines said his client wished to have the option of quitting at the end of any year, though he would probably continue for the three. In point of fact, Mr. Edwin Barley is a yearly

tenant ; but he wished to have the power in his own hands of remaining the three years. I did speak to you, Mr. Chandos, and you made no objection.”

Mr. Chandos sat, twirling the watch-key and beautiful transparent seal that drooped from his gold chain. It was self-evident to him that what might appear to be just terms for any other man on the face of the earth who had offered himself as tenant, looked anything but just now that the tenant proved to be Mr. Edwin Barley.

“ And the agreement is signed of course ?”

“ Signed, sealed, and delivered,” was the answer of Mr. Dexter, who had taken the remark as a question.

“ Just so. And there are no legal means of getting rid of the man ?”

“ None at all, sir, for three years, if he pleases to stop. But, Mr. Chandos, he appears to me to be an exceedingly eligible tenant—so very wealthy and respectable a gentleman !”

“ Wealthy and respectable though he may be, I would give a thousand pounds to be quit of him, Dexter.”

“ But why, sir ?” repeated the agent, in surprise.

“ He is not likely to prove an agreeable neighbour. I don’t like the look of him.”

“ Pardon the suggestion, Mr. Chandos, but you are not obliged to have anything to do with him,” returned the agent, who looked as though the views propounded were quite different from any he had ever met with. “ So long as Mr. Edwin Barley keeps his house respectable and pays his rent, that’s all you need know of him, sir, unless you like.”

“ What brought him to settle himself here ?” abruptly asked Mr. Chandos.

“ Well, I inquired once, but got no satisfactory answer. They say his own place by Nettleby is quite magnificent, compared to this house that he has taken. I remarked upon it to Haines : ‘ Gentlemen liked to go about the country and please their fancy for change,’ Haines answered me. Which is true enough, sir.”

Mr. Chandos gave a sort of incredulous nod, and the agent rose.

“ Now that I have seen you, sir, and had the

pleasure of ascertaining that the injury is less than report said, I'll be going back again. But I shall keep my eyes open for a woman in a gray cloak. If I meet one, I'll pounce upon her, as sure as my name's Bob Dexter. Pray don't trouble yourself, young lady ! I know my way out."

I had risen to ring the bell. Mr. Dexter was gone beforehand, and we heard the hall-door close after him with a sharp click.

Just as the tea-things were taken away, Lizzy Dene came in. The woman looked wild to-night ; her eyes were shining as with fire ; her dark cheeks had a glow in them as of fever ; the bunches of black curls on either side were tangled ; and she had not removed her bonnet and shawl before appearing in the presence of Mr. Chandos.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" she said, "but I thought I'd tell you where I've been to."

"Well?" returned Mr. Chandos, turning his head to her from the sofa.

"I couldn't get it out of my head, sir, that the woman who served you that trick must be

one of the gipsies, so I just put my best foot foremost, and walked over to the common. They are encamped at the far end of it, down in the hollow amid the trees. Such a sight! A big tent lighted with a torch stuck in the ground, and four or five women and children in it, and straw beds in the corner, with brown rugs, and a pot a-boiling on the fire outside. But I had my walk for nothing; for the women seemed quiet and peaceable enough; one of them was sewing, and, so far as I saw, they had never a gray cloak between 'em. There was an old creature bent double, she could scarce hobble, and two young women with babies to their breasts, and there was a growing girl or two. I'm bound to confess that none of them looked wicked enough to have been the one that set on you, sir."

"Well?" repeated Mr. Chandos, regarding Lizzy with some wonder. "What else?"

"Why, sir, this. If it was one of the gipsies that attacked you, she's not back at the camp yet; she must be in hiding somewhere; and most likely it's in these very grounds, where they're

thickest. If all the men went out to beat the place, they might drop upon her."

There was something curiously eager about the woman as she spoke, with her cheeks and eyes glowing, and her tone full of passion. I think it struck Mr. Chandos. It certainly struck me, and to a degree that set me wondering. But Mr. Chandos betrayed no curiosity, and answered with quiet decision.

"We will forget this, Lizzy Dene; at any rate for the present. I am tired of the subject; and I do not suppose it to have been any of the gipsies. Some poor mad woman, more probably, escaped from the county asylum. Don't trouble yourself about it further."

Lizzy looked hard at him, as if she would have said more, but finally withdrew in silence.

"Tired of everything, I think, to-night!" he added, with a weary sigh, as she closed the door. "Tired even of reading!"

"Can I do anything to amuse you, Mr. Chandos?" I asked, for he threw his book on the stand.

"Ay. Sit you down on that low chair, and

tell me the stories of your past life, after the manner of fairy-tales."

The chair was on the opposite side to the sofa, and I sat down upon it. He bade me come quite close to him, lest he should not hear. Which must have been said in jest, for his ears were quick. But I drew it nearer.

"Now for fairy-tale the first. How shall you begin?"

"I don't know how to begin, sir. My life has had no fairy-tales in it. I have not had a home, as other girls have."

"Not had a home!"

"I had one when I was a little girl. Mamma lived in a cottage in Devonshire, and I was with her."

"So you are a little Devonshire woman?"

"No; I was born in India. Mamma brought me over when I was three years old."

"And your father?"

"He had to stay behind in India. He was in the army. After that he sold out to come home, and died very soon. Mamma died when I was eleven, and since that I have been at school."

“Had you no relatives to offer you a home?”

“No!” And I felt my face flush as I thought of Mr. Edwin Barley. He must have noticed it: he was looking at me.

“No home all those years! How you must long for one!”

“I keep my longings down. It may never be my happiness to know a home; certainly there is no present prospect of it. I resign myself to my position, doing my duty, as it is placed before me, and not looking beyond it.”

“What do you call your ‘position’?”

“That of a governess.”

“I should say you are of gentle blood?”

“Oh yes.”

He paused. I paused. I saw that he expected I should tell him something more about myself and my family; and I would willingly have told all, but for having to bring in the names of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Barley. The fear of doing that; of alluding to the dreadful events of the past, clung to me still as a nightmare. Mr. Chandos, who did not fail to detect the reluctance, concluded there must be some reason for it, not

expedient to tell ; he quitted the subject at once, with the innate delicacy of a refined man, and did not again, then or later, make allusion to my family.

“ Well, now for the fairy tales. Begin. If you don’t tell me something worth hearing, I shall fall asleep.”

I laughed ; and related to him one or two short anecdotes of my school life, and then remembered the supper-scene at Miss Fenton’s, and the setting on fire of Georgina Digges. He had grown interested in that, and we were both talking very fast, when the clock struck ten. I got up and put away the low chair.

“ Good-night, sir.”

“ Good-night—*miss* !”

It made me laugh. He took my hand, kept it for a minute in his, and said he wished me pleasant dreams.

“ I shall dream of a woman in a gray cloak. But, Mr. Chandos ! in one sense, the accident is a good thing for you.”

“ You must explain how. I don’t see it.”

“ With that disabled foot you may make sure

of uninterrupted rest. There is no fear that you will leave your bed to-night to walk in the moonlight."

" You go to bed, and to sleep, and never mind looking for me in the moonlight; to-night, or any other night."

His mood had changed; his brow had grown angry, his voice stern. The thought of having alluded to his infirmity brought back all my humiliation.

" I beg your pardon, sir," I meekly said. And he released my hand without another word.

I thought of it all the time I was undressing; I thought of it after I was in bed. Not of that only, but of other things. If Mr. Edwin Barley was the enemy of the family, as hinted at by Mr. Chandos, and could do them at will irreparable injury; and if he, Edwin Barley, had thus brought himself into proximity, because he had learnt in some unaccountable manner that I was staying there, how they would have cause to detest me! Of course it might not be. Mr. Edwin Barley might have come for his own purposes to Chandos, irrespective of me. I could

only hope it was so ; but the doubt caused me most jealously to guard his name, as a connection of mine, from Mr. Chandos.

I dropped into peaceful sleep. My last thought, as it stole over me, was to wonder whether Lizzy Dene and the other maids were watching from the turret-window for the ghost in the pine-walk.

smooth road. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, the leafy trees were dancing.

“Now mind!” Hill had said to me. “All you have to do is to put by word of mouth these questions written down for you, and to take strict note of the answers, so as to report them accurately when you come back. They are but ordinary questions: or else you would not be sent. Be discreet, young lady, and don’t talk on your own score.”

I opened the paper and read over the questions as we went along. Simple queries, as Hill had said; just such as are put when a dependent, whether lady or servant, is being engaged. The address given was “Mrs. Charles Howard, number nine, King Street, Marden.” And there the carriage drew up. Carrying the paper, I was shown up stairs to the drawing-rooms, sending in my name—“Miss Hereford.”

Handsome rooms, two communicating. A lady, very much dressed in elaborate morning costume, rose to receive me. I found it was Mrs. Howard, and entered upon my queries.

They were most satisfactorily answered. A

higher character than she gave to Mrs. Penn could not be tendered. Mrs. Penn was faithful, good, discreet, and trustworthy; very capable in all ways, and invaluable in a sick room. Her regret at parting with her was great, but she, Mrs. Howard, was going to Brussels on a long visit to her married daughter, and it would be inconvenient to take Mrs. Penn. She should be so glad to see her settled elsewhere comfortably, before leaving England.

So voluble was Mrs. Howard, saying ten times more than she need have said, that I could not get in a word. I should have liked her better had she been less flourishing in speech, and not worn quite so many ornaments. As soon as I could speak, I asked if I might see Mrs. Penn, such having been Hill's instructions to me, in case the references proved satisfactory.

Mrs. Howard rang for her, and she came in. She wore a bright violet gown of some soft material; her red hair was disposed in waving bands low on her forehead and taken back underneath her cap. *Had I seen her anywhere in my past life?* The expression of her full face when her

eyes were turned on me seemed so familiar ; striking upon the mind like something we may have seen in a dream ; but when I examined her features I could not trace in them any remembrance. Perhaps I was mistaken. We do see faces that resemble others as we go through the world.

I told her she was to proceed with as little delay as possible to Chandos, to hold an interview with its mistress ; when she would probably be engaged.

My mission over, I entered the carriage to be driven home again. We had nearly reached Chandos when I missed my pocket-handkerchief. It was one that had been embroidered for me by a favourite schoolfellow at Miss Barlieu's, Marguerite Van Blumm, and I valued it for her sake. Besides, I only possessed two handsome handkerchiefs in the world : that, and one I had bought in Paris. I hoped I had left it at Mrs. Howard's, and that Mrs. Penn would bring it to me.

To my great amazement, when I got home, I found Mrs. Penn was already there. Not engaged : Hill was waiting to hear my report of

what Mrs. Howard said. Mr. Chandos laughed at the expression of my face.

“The triumph of steam over carriage wheels, Miss Hereford. She took a train immediately, and a fly on at Hetton station.”

The fly was outside the windows as he spoke ; it had drawn away from the door to allow the carriage to set me down. I did not see Mrs. Penn ; she was waiting in the large drawing-room ; and I did not like to make the fuss to go to her and ask about my handkerchief.

But a quarter of an hour, and it was driving her back to Hetton. She was engaged ; and had agreed to enter that same evening. She came, quite punctually. But for a day or two afterwards it so fell out that I did not see her.

The first time we met was one morning, when I was finishing breakfast. Mrs. Penn came into the oak-parlour with her bonnet and shawl on. She had been out of doors.

“I don’t know what your grim old butler will say to me, but I have forestalled him with the postman,” she began, without any other greeting. “Unless I take a turn for ten minutes

in the open air of a morning, I feel stifled for the day: the postman came up while I was in the broad walk, and I took the letters from him. Only two," she continued, regarding the addresses in a free and easy sort of manner scarcely becoming her position. "Both foreign letters," she went on in a running comment. "One is for Harry Chandos, Esquire; the other for Miss Hereford. That is yourself, I think."

"I am Miss Hereford."

"It is a pretty name," she observed, looking at me: "almost as pretty as you are. Do you remember in the school history of England we are told of the banishment of Lord Hereford by his sovereign, and how it broke his heart? Is your Christian name as pretty?"

"It is Anne."

"Anne Hereford! A nice name altogether. Where do your friends live?"

Instead of answering, I rose and rang the bell for the butler; who came in.

"The letters are here Hickens," I said, putting the one for Mr. Chandos in his hand, while I kept mine. Hickens with a dubious air, looked

alternately at me, and the letters, as if wondering how they came there. I explained.

“Mrs. Penn brought them in. She tells me she met the postman in the broad walk, and took them from him.”

“Please to let the man bring the letters to the house, ma’am, should you meet him again,” Hickens respectfully observed, turning to Mrs. Penn. “My lady never allows any one to take them from the postman: he brings them into the hall, and delivers them into my hand. Once when Miss Emily was at home, she took them from the man in the grounds, and my lady was very much displeased with her. Her ladyship is exceedingly strict in the matter.”

“How particular they seem about their letters!” exclaimed Mrs. Penn in an undertone, as Hickens departed with his master’s.

“Many families are so. Mr. Paler was worse than this, for he always liked to take the letters from the facteur himself.”

“Who is Mr. Paler?” she questioned.

“I have been living as governess in his family in Paris. Mrs. Penn, may I ask you whether I

left a handkerchief at Mrs. Howard's the day I went there?"

"Not that I know of. I did not hear of it. Have you lost one?"

"Yes; one that I valued: it was a keepsake. I know I had it in the carriage in going to Marden, but I remember nothing of it subsequently. When I got home I missed it."

"You most likely dropped it in stepping out of the carriage."

"Yes, I fear so."

She quitted the room with a remark that her time was up. I opened my letter, which was in Emily de Mellissie's handwriting; and read as follows:

"The idea of your making all this fuss! Though I suppose it is mamma's fault, not yours. She is neither poison nor a tiger, and therefore will not do the house irretrievable damage. It's not my fault if Alfred has taken this gastric fever, and I am detained here. I'd rather be in the wilds of Africa, I do assure you, scampering over the sandy desert on a mad pony, than con-

demned to be pent up in sick-chambers. Fancy what it is! Alfred reduced to a skeleton, in his bed on alternate days, taking nothing but *tisane*, and that sort of slops, and lamenting that he won't get over it: Madame de Mellissie in *her* bed, groaning under an agonizing attack of sciatica ; and I doing duty between the two. It's dreadful. I should come off to Chandos tomorrow and leave them till they were better, but that the world would call me hard-hearted, and any other polite name it could lay its tongue to. Every second day he seems nearly as well as I am, and says I shall be sure to start for Chandos on the next. When the next comes, there he is, down again with fever. And that is my present fate!—which is quite miserable enough without your reproaching me for being thoughtless, and all the rest of it. How I should get through the dreary days but for some novels and a few callers, I don't know ; but the novels are not exciting, and the visitors are stupid. Paris is empty just now, and as dull as a dungeon. Don't go worrying me with any more letters reflecting on my 'prudence,' or I shall send them

back to you. If mamma orders you to write, tell her plainly that you won't. Pray who is Anne Hereford, that she should be allowed to disturb the peace of Chandos? Indeed Harry, she is *nobody!* and you need not stand on ceremony with her. I am sorry that her staying there just now should be so very inconvenient—as you hint that it is. Mamma has a great dislike to have people in the house, I know; but the leaving her was really not my fault, as you ought to see. I will be over as soon as I can, for my own sake, and relieve you of her:—you cannot form an idea what it is here, no soirées going on, no fêtes, no anything. But if you really cannot allow her to remain until then, the shortest way will be to let her go to Nulle.

“Love to mamma, and believe me, your affectionate sister,

“EMILY DE MELLISSE.”

I read nearly to the end before suspecting that the letter was not meant for me. I had supposed it to be the answer to the one I despatched to Emily in the previous week. Some one else—

as it would appear—had despatched one also, remonstrating at the inconvenience my presence caused at Chandos.

With a face that was burning in its every lineament—with hands that trembled as they closed—with a heart that felt half sick with shame—I started up. That very moment I would write word to Madame de Mellissie that I was quitting Chandos ; and to Miss Barlieu, to say I was coming. In the midst of which paroxysm there entered Mr. Chandos, between Hickens and a stick.

He sat down in an arm-chair, wishing me good morning. When the man had gone I advanced to him with the open letter.

“ This letter must be intended for you, I think, Mr. Chandos, although it was addressed to me. It is from Madame Alfred de Mellissie.”

“ Just so,” he said, taking it, and handing me the one he himself held. “ This I presume is for you, as it begins ‘ My dear Anne Hereford.’ Emily has betrayed her characteristic heedlessness, in sending my letter to you, and yours to me.”

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He ran his eyes over the note, and then called to me. I stood looking from the window.

“Have you read this?”

“Every word. Until I came to my own name I never suspected that it was not written for me. I am very sorry, Mr. Chandos; but I hope you will not blame me: indeed it was done inadvertently.”

“So am I sorry,” he answered, in a joking sort of tone, as if he would pass the matter over lightly. “Emily’s letters ought to be preserved in the British Museum.”

Before he could say more, Hill came in, and began talking with him in an undertone, looking crossly at me. Of course it drove me away. I went to the portico, and read my letter.

“MY DEAR ANNE HEREFORD,

“You need not trouble yourself at all about being what you call ‘an encumbrance’ at Chandos, but just make yourself contented until I can come over. Mamma and my brother ought to be glad to have you there, for they are mured up alone from year’s end to year’s end. Keep out

of their way as much as possible, so as not to annoy them. “Yours sincerely,

“EMILY DE MELLISSIE.

“P.S.—Of course you might go to Miss Barlieu’s, if Lady Chandos deems it expedient that you should.”

A fine specimen of contradiction the note presented. I folded it and went upstairs, one determination strong upon me—to depart for Nulle.

Mrs. Penn was standing at the gallery-window between my room and the library. She was dressed handsomely, this new companion: a gray silk robe, a gold chain, a pretty blonde-lace cap mingling with her nearly scarlet hair, valuable rings on her fingers. Just as I took likes and dislikes when a child, so I took them still. And I did not like Mrs. Penn.

“I cannot divest myself of the notion that I have met you before, Mrs. Penn,” I said. “But I am unable to recollect where.”

“I can tell you,” she answered. “You were at school at Nulle, and attended the English

Protestant Church. It was there you and I used to see each other."

"There?" I repeated incredulously, thinking she must be wrong.

"Yes, there," said Mrs. Penn. "I was staying in the town for some weeks two or three years ago; I remembered your face again here directly, though you have grown much. You were wont to study my face nearly as much as you studied your prayer-book. I used to wonder what you found in me to admire."

Throw my recollection back as I would, I could not connect the face before me with my associations of Nulle. It certainly might have been there that we met—and indeed why should she say so, were it not?—but it did not seem to be. As to the looking off the prayer-book part, I was sure that there could not have been much of that, the English governess who succeeded Miss Johnstone always watched us so sharply.

"Did you know the Miss Barlieus, Mrs. Penn?"

"Only by sight; I had no acquaintance with them. Quite old maids they are."

"They are kind, good women," I broke out, indignantly, and Mrs. Penn laughed.

"Somewhat careless withal, are they not? I think that was exemplified in the matter relating to Miss Chandos."

I could not answer. The whole blame had lain with Emily, but I did not choose to say that to Mrs. Penn. She was turning her gold chain round and round her finger, her very light blue eyes seemingly fixed on the opposite pine-trees, and when she spoke again her voice had dropped to a low tone.

"Do you believe in ghosts, Miss Hereford?"

"Ghosts?" I echoed, astonished at the question.

"Ghosts," she repeated. "Do you believe that the dead come again?"

"When I see any ghosts I will tell you whether I believe in them or not," I said jokingly. "Up to the present time it has not been my good fortune to fall in with any."

"It is said," she proceeded, looking round with caution, "that a ghost haunts Chandos. Have you not seen any strange sights?"

“No, indeed. It would very much astonish me to see such—if by ‘strange sights’ you mean ghosts.”

“I saw one once,” she said.

“Mrs. Penn!”

“A lady died in a house where I was staying; died almost suddenly. If ever I saw anything in my life, I saw her after she was in her grave. You look at me with incredulity.”

“I cannot fancy that a real genuine ghost was ever seen. I am aware that strange tales are told—and believed: but I think they are but tales of the imagination.”

“In speaking of strange tales do you allude to Chandos?”

“Certainly not. I spoke of the world in general?”

“You take me up sharply. Nevertheless, strange tales are whispered of Chandos. On a moonlight night, as report runs, the spirit of Sir Thomas may be seen in the walks.”

“Does it swim over from India to take its promenade?” I mockingly asked.

“You are of thinking the present baronet: he

is not dead: I spoke of the late one. Look out some of these light nights, will you, and tell me whether you see anything. I cannot; for the available windows of the east wing do not face this way. They say he takes exercise there;" pointing to the pine walk.

"Did you say Sir Thomas's ghost, Mrs. Penn?" I asked, laughing.

"The world says so. I hear that some of the maids here, seeing the sight, have arrived at the notion that it is only Mr. Harry Chandos given to come out of his room at night and take moon-light promenades."

There was a ball in the window-seat, and I tossed it with indifference. She had got hold of the wrong story, and it was not my place to set her right. Hill came up, saying Mr. Chandos wished to speak to me; but I did not hurry down.

I had made my mind up to borrow sufficient money of him to take me to Nulle, and was trying to call up courage to ask it. His leg was upon a rest when I went in, and he leaned back in his chair reading a newspaper.

"I want to speak to you, Miss Hereford."

“And I—wanted—to speak to you, sir, if you please,” I said resolutely, in spite of my natural hesitation.

“Very well. Place aux dames. You shall have the first word.”

It appeared, however, that Lizzy Dene was to have that. She came in at the moment, asked leave to speak, and began a recital of a second visit she had paid the gipsies the previous night, in which she had accused them of having attacked Mr. Chandos. The recital was a long one and delivered curiously, very fast and in one tone, just as if she were repeating from a book, and imparting the idea that it had been learnt by heart. She wound up with saying the gipsies quitted the common in the night ; and therefore no doubt could remain that one of the women had been the assailant. Mr. Chandos regarded her keenly.

“Lizzy Dene, what is your motive for pursuing these gipsies in the way you do? No one accuses them but you.”

“Motive, sir?” returned the woman.

“Ay ; motive,” he pointedly said. “I shall

begin to suspect that you know more about the matter than you would like made public. I think it is you to whom we must look for an explanation, not the gipsies."

Did you ever see a pale face turn to a glowing, fiery red?—the scarlet of confusion, if not of guilt? So turned Lizzy Dene's, to my utter amazement, and I think to that of her master. Could *she* have had anything to do with the attack upon him? She stammered forth a few deprecatory words, that, in suspecting the gipsies, she had only been actuated by the wish to serve Mr. Chandos, and backed out of the parlour.

Backed out to find herself confronted by a tall swarthy man, who had made his way into the hall without the ceremony of knocking for admittance. One of the gipsies unquestionably. Lizzy Dene gave a half shriek and flew away, and the man came inside the room, fixing his piercing eyes upon those of Mr. Chandos.

"It has been told to me this morning that you and your people accuse us of having assaulted you," he began, without prelude. "Master, I have walked back ten miles to set it right."

“I have not accused you,” said Mr. Chandos. “The assault upon me—if it can be called such—proceeded from a woman; but I have no more cause to suspect that it was one of your women, than I have to suspect any other woman in the wide world.”

“’Twas none of ours, master. We was ’camped upon your common, and you let us stop there unmolested; some lords of the soil drive us off ere we can pitch our tent, hunt us away as they’d hunt a hare. You didn’t; you spoke kind to us, more than once in passing, you spoke kind to our little children; and we’d have protected you with our own lives, any one of us, had need been. Do you believe me, master?”

The man’s voice was earnest, and he raised his honest eyes, fierce though they were, to Mr. Chandos, waiting for the question to be answered.

“I do believe you.”

“That’s well, then, and what I came back hoping to hear. But now, master, I’ll tell ye what I saw myself that same night. I was coming up toward this way, and you overtook me, riding fast. May be you noticed me, for I touched my hat.”

“ I remember it,” said Mr. Chandos.

“ You rode in at the gates at a hand gallop ; I could hear the horse’s hoofs in the silence of the evening. I met one of our fellows, and stopped to speak to him, which hindered me three—or four minutes ; and—you know them trees to the left of the gate, master, with posts afore ‘em ?”

“ Well ?” said Mr. Chandos.

“ There stood a woman there when I got up. She was taking off a gray cloak, and she folded it small and put it on her arm and walked away. Folks put on clothes at night, instead of taking ‘em off, was in my thoughts, and I looked after her.”

“ Did you know her ?”

“ I never saw her afore. She was one in your condition of life, master, for her clothes were brave, and the rings glittered on her fingers. Next morning when we heard what had happened, we said she was the one. I have not seen her since. She seemed to be making for the railroad.”

“ Why did you not come and tell me this at the time ?”

“Nay, master, was it any business of mine? How did I know I should be welcome? or that our people was suspected? That’s all, sir.”

“Will you take some refreshment?” said Mr. Chandos. “You are welcome to it.”

“Master, I don’t need any.”

The man, with a rude salute to me, turned and departed, and we saw him treading the gravel walk with a fearless step. Mr. Chandos turned to me with a smile.

“What do you think of all this?”

“I am sure that the gipsies are innocent.”

“I have been tolerably sure of that from the first, for I knew that their interest did not lie in making an enemy of me; rather the contrary; what puzzles me, is Lizzy Dene’s manner. But let us return to the matter we were interrupted in, Miss Hereford. Go on with what you were about to say.”

Very shrinkingly I began, standing close to him, giving him a sketch of the circumstances (Mrs. Paler’s tardy payment) that caused me to be without money; and asking him to lend me a trifle: just enough to take me back to Nulle.

About a guinea, I thought, or a guinea and a half: I had a few shillings left still. Mr. Chandos seemed highly amused, smiling in the most provoking way.

“ Does Mrs. Paler really owe you thirty guineas ? ”

“ Yes, sir. It is half a year’s salary.”

“ Then I think she ought to pay you.”

“ Will you lend me the trifle, sir ? ”

“ No. Not for the purpose you name. I will lend you as much as you like to put in your pocket: but not to take you to Nulle.”

“ I must go, sir. At least I must go somewhere. And I only know the Miss Barlicus in all the world.”

“ You wish to go because, in consequence of Emily’s letter, you are deeming yourself an encumbrance at Chandos ? ”

I made no answer in words: the colour that flushed into my cheeks was all-sufficient.

“ Let me speak to you confidentially,” he said, taking my hand in his; “ for a few minutes we will understand each other as friends. I am grieved that Emily’s carelessness should have

been the cause of annoyance to you ; my mother will be sadly vexed when I tell her ; but you must now listen to the explanation. There are certain family reasons which render it inexpedient for a stranger to be located at Chandos ; even Emily herself would not at all times be welcome. Emily left you here. As the days went on, and we heard nothing from her, my mother desired me to write and inquire when she would be over, and to reprove her thoughtlessness in leaving you at Chandos, when she knew why it was more expedient that we should be alone. I simply wrote what my mother desired me ; no more ; and this letter of Emily's to-day is the answer to it. Now you have the whole gist of the affair. But I must ask you fully to understand that it is not to you personally my mother has an objection ; on the contrary, she likes you ; the objection applies to *any* one, save its regular inmates, who may be at Chandos. Did a royal princess offer a visit here, she would be equally unwelcome. Do you understand this ?”

“ Quite so. But, understanding it, I can only see the more necessity for my leaving.”

“ And where would you go ? ”

“ To Nulle. To the Miss Barlieus.”

“ No ; that would not do,” he said. “ Emily has left you here under our charge, and we cannot part with you, except to her. You said you must be guided by me in your reading ; you must be guided by me also in this.”

“ I should only be too willing under happier circumstances. But you cannot imagine how uncomfortable is the feeling of knowing that I am intruding here in opposition to the wish of Lady Chandos.”

“ Lady Chandos does not blame you for it ; be assured of that. And I can tell you my mother has other things to think of just now than of you —or Emily either. Will you try and make yourself contented ? ”

“ You must please not say any more, Mr. Chandos. If I had nowhere else to go to, it would be a different thing ; but I have Miss Barlieu’s house.”

“ And suppose you had not that ? Would you make yourself contented and stay ? ”

“ Yes,” I said, rashly.

“Then be happy from this moment. Miss Barlieu’s house is a barred one to you at present.”

Something like a leap of joy seemed to take my heart. His tone of truth was not to be mistaken.

“Lady Chandos had a note from Miss Annette on Saturday,” he said, his beautiful truthful eyes fixed on my face with the same steady earnestness that they had been all along. “Amidst other news it contained the unpleasant tidings that fever had broken out at Nulle; one of their young ladies had been seized with it, and was lying very ill; and another was sickening.”

“Oh, Mr. Chandos!”

“So you see we should not allow you to go there just now. Neither would the Miss Barlieus receive you. As my mother observed, that news settled the question.”

I remained silent: in my shock and perplexity.

“Fever seems to be busy this autumn,” he remarked carelessly. “It is in this neighbourhood; it is in Paris; it is in Nulle: and probably in a great many more places.”

“But, Mr. Chandos! What am I to do?”

“ There is only one thing that you can do—or that Lady Chandos would allow you to do ; and that is, stay here. Not another word, Miss Hereford. You can’t help yourself, you know,” he added, laughing ; “ and we are happy to have you.”

“ But the objection that Lady Chandos feels to having any one ?”

“ Ah well—you will not be a dangerous visitor. If the worst came to the worst, we shall have to enlist you on our side, and make you take a vow of fidelity to Chandos and its interests.”

He was speaking in a laughing joking way, so that one could not tell whether his words were jest or earnest. Still they were curious ones.

“ That is the situation, young lady. You can’t help yourself, you see, if you would. How much money will you have ?”

“ Oh, sir, none. I do not require it, if I am not to go. I wish—as I am to stay here—I could make myself useful to some one.”

“ So you can ; you can be useful to me. I will constitute you my head-nurse and walking companion. I shall use your shoulder at will

until my foot has its free use again. Take care I don't tire you out."

He had kept my hand in his all that while, and now those deep blue speaking eyes of his, gazing still into mine, danced with merriment or pleasure. A thrill of rapture ran through me, and I never asked myself wherefore. Could it be that I was learning to love Mr. Chandos?

I sat in the oak-parlour through the live-long day; I had nowhere else to sit but in my bedroom. Dangerous companionship!—that of an attractive man like Mr. Chandos.

Calling Hickens to his aid in the afternoon, he went slowly up to the apartments of Lady Chandos, and I saw no more of him until dinner time. Meanwhile I wrote a long letter to Miss Annette, expressing my great sympathy with the illness amidst the school-girls, and begging her to write and tell me which of them were ill, and also to let me know the very instant that the house should be safe again, for that I wanted to come to it.

In the evening Mr. Chandos, his lamp at his elbow, read aloud from a volume of Tennyson.

I worked. Never had poetry sounded so sweet before ; never will it sound sweeter ; and when I went up-stairs to bed, the melodious measure, and that still more melodious voice, yet rang in my ears.

To bed, but not to rest. What was the matter with me ? I know not, but I could not sleep. Tossing and turning from side to side, now a line of the poems would recur to me : now would rise up the face of Mr. Chandos ; now the remembrance of Lady Chandos's vexation at my being there. As the clock struck one, I rose from my uneasy bed, determined to try what walking about the chamber would do. Pulling the blind aside, quietly opening the shutters, I paused to look out on the lovely night, its clear atmosphere and its shining stars nearly as bright as day.

Why !—was I awake ? or was I dreaming ? There, under shade of the thick trees, keeping close to them, as if not wishing to be seen, but all too plain to me nevertheless, paced Mr. Chandos, wrapped in a large over-coat. What had become of his lame foot ? That he walked

slowly, as one does who is weak, there was no denying, but still he did not walk *lame*. Did, or would, a state of somnambulancy cause a disabled limb to recover temporary service and strength? Every sense I possessed, every reason, answered no. As I gazed at the sight with bewildered brain and beating heart, Mrs. Penn's words flashed over me—that it was the ghost of the dead Sir Thomas which was said to haunt the groves of Chandos.

Could it be? Was I looking at a real ghost? We all know how susceptible the brain is to superstition in the lonely midnight hours, and I succumbed in that moment to an awful terror. Don't laugh at me. With a smothered cry, I flew to the bed, leaped in, and covered my face with the bedclothes.

One idea was uppermost amid the many that crowded on me. If that was indeed the spirit of Sir Thomas, he must have died a younger man than I supposed, and have borne a great likeness to his son, Harry Chandos.

The morning's bright sun dispelled all ghostly illusions. I went out of doors as soon as I got

down, just for a run along the broad walk and back again. At the corner where the angle hid the house, I came upon Mrs. Penn and the postman, only a few yards off. She had stopped him to look at the addresses of the letters he was bringing. The sight sent me back again; but not before she turned and saw me. Not only did the action appear to me dishonourable—one I could not have countenanced—but some instinct seemed to say that Mrs. Penn was unjustifiably prying into the affairs of the Chandos family.

As Hickens took the letters from the man in the hall, Mrs. Penn came into the oak-parlour. I was pouring out my coffee then.

“I am quite in despair,” she exclaimed, flinging herself into a chair, with short ceremony. “These three days have I been expecting news of an invalid friend; and it does not come. I hope and trust she is not dead!”

“Perhaps she is unable to write?”

“She is. I said news of her; not from her. When I saw the postman come in at the gates just now, hope rose up within me, and I ran to meet

him. But hope was false. The man brought me no letter, nothing but disappointment."

I am not sure but I must have had a wicked heart about that time. Instead of feeling sympathy with Mrs. Penn and her sick friend, a sort of doubt came over me, that she was only saying this to excuse her having stopped the postman. She untied the strings of her black lace bonnet, and rose, saying she supposed breakfast would be ready by the time she got upstairs.

"Mrs. Penn," I interposed, taking a sudden resolution to speak, "was that a joke of yours yesterday, about Sir Thomas Chandos?"

"About his ghost, do you mean? It was certainly not my joke. Why?"

"Nothing. I have been thinking about it."

"I don't tell you the ghost comes; but I should watch if I had the opportunity. The shutters in the front of the east wing are unfortunately fastened down with iron staples. I conclude—I *conclude*," repeated Mrs. Penn, slowly and thoughtfully—"as a precaution against the looking out of Mrs. Chandos."

"I dare say it is the greatest nonsense in the

world. A ghost ! People have grown wise now."

" I dare say it may be nonsense," she rejoined. " But for one thing I should heartily say it is nothing else."

" And that one thing, Mrs. Penn ?"

" I will not disclose it to you, Anne Hereford. The report is common enough in the neighbourhood. Inquire of any of the petty shopkeepers in the hamlet, and you will find it to be so. They will tell you that rumours have been afloat for a long while that Sir Thomas may be seen at night in the pine walk."

She quitted the room as she spoke, leaving on my mind a stronger impression than ever that I had met her somewhere in my lifetime, had talked with her and she with me. There was in her manner an unconscious familiarity rarely indulged in save from old acquaintanceship. It was strange that she and Mr. Chandos should both strike on chords of my memory. Chords that would not be traced.

They were fortunate in this new companion. Gathering a word from one and another, I heard

she was thoroughly efficient. And they made much of her, treating her essentially as a lady. She went out in the carriage with Mrs. Chandos; she talked to Mr. Chandos as an equal; she patronised me. But a whisper floated through the house that the only one who did not take kindly to her was Mrs. Chandos.

CHAPTER IX.

TELEGRAPHING FOR A PHYSICIAN.

SOME uncomfortable days passed on. Uncomfortable in one sense. Heaven knows I was happy enough, for the society of Mr. Chandos had become all too dear, and in it I was basking away the golden hours. Looking back now I cannot sufficiently blame myself. Not for staying at Chandos ; I could not help that ; but for allowing my heart to yield unresistingly to the love. How could I suppose it would end ? Alas ! that was what I never so much as thought of: the present was becoming too much of an Elysium for me to look questioningly beyond it ; it was as a very haven of sweet and happy rest.

With some of the other inmates, things seemed to be anything but easy. Lady Chandos was still invisible ; and, by what I could gather, growing

daily worse. Mr. Chandos, his lameness better, looked bowed down with a weight of apprehensive care. Hill was in a state of fume and fret; and the women servants, meeting in odd corners, spoke whisperingly of the figure that nightly haunted Chandos.

What astonished me more than anything was, that no medical man was called in to Lady Chandos. Quite unintentionally, without being able to help myself, I overheard a few words spoken between Hill and Mr. Chandos. That Lady Chandos was dangerously ill, and medical aid an absolute necessity, appeared indisputable; and yet it seemed they did not dare to summon it. It was a riddle unfathomable. The surgeon from Hetton, Mr. Dickenson, came still to Mr. Chandos every day. What would have been easier than for him to go up to Lady Chandos? He never did, however; he was not asked to do so. Day after day he would say, "How is Lady Chandos?" and Mr. Chandos's reply would be, "Much the same."

The omission also struck on Mrs. Penn. One day, when she had come into my chamber

uninvited, she spoke of it abruptly, looking full in my face, in her keen way.

“How is it they don’t have a doctor to her?”

“What is the use of asking me, Mrs. Penn? I cannot tell why they don’t.”

“Do you never hear Mr. Chandos say why?”

“Never. At the beginning of her illness, he said his mother knew how to treat herself, and that she had a dislike to doctors.

“There’s more in it than that, I think,” returned Mrs. Penn, in a tone of significance. “That surly Hill won’t answer a single question. All I get out of her is, ‘My lady’s no better.’ Mrs. Chandos goes into the west wing most days, but she is as close as Hill. The fact is—it is very unfortunate, but Mrs. Chandos appears to have taken a dislike to me.”

“Taken a dislike to you!”

Mrs. Penn nodded. “And not a word upon any subject, save the merest conversational trifles, will she speak. But I have my own opinion of Lady Chandos’s illness: if I am right, their reticence is accounted for.”

Again the tone was so significant that I could

but note it, and looked to her for an explanation. She dropped her voice as she gave it.

“ I think that the malady which has attacked Lady Chandos is not bodily, but mental ; and that they, in consequence, keep her in seclusion. Poor woman ! She has had enough trouble to drive her mad.”

“ Oh, Mrs. Penn ! Mad !”

“ I mean what I say.”

“ But did you not have an interview with her when you came ?”

“ Yes, a short one. Harry Chandos was sitting with her, and went out, after a few words to me, staying in the next room. It seemed to me that she was impatient to have him back again : any way, she cut the meeting very short. I am bound to say that she appeared collected then.”

Mrs. Penn lifted her hand, glittering with rings, to her brow as she spoke, and pushed slightly back her glowing hair. Her face looked troubled—that kind of trouble that arises from perplexity.

“ Allowing it to be as you fancy, Mrs. Penn,

they would surely have a doctor to her. Any medical man, if requested, would keep the secret."

"Ah! it's not altogether that, I expect," returned Mrs. Penn, with a curious look. "You would keep it, and I would keep it, as inmates of the family; and yet you see how jealously we are excluded. I suspect the true motive is, that they dare not risk the revelations she might make."

"What revelations?"

"You do not, perhaps, know it, Miss Hereford, but there is a sword hanging over the Chandos family," she continued, dropping her voice to a whisper. "An awful sword. It is suspended by a hair; and a chance word of betrayal might cause it to fall. Of that chance word the Chandoses live in dread. Lady Chandos, if she be really insane, might inadvertently speak it."

"Over which of them?" I exclaimed, in dismay.

"I had rather not tell you which. It lies over them all, so to say. It is that, beyond question, which keeps Sir Thomas in India: when the blow comes, he can battle with it better there

than at home. They lie under enough disgrace as it is: they will lie under far greater then."

"They appear to be just those quiet, unpretending, honourable people who could not invoke disgrace. They—surely you cannot be alluding to Miss Chandos's runaway marriage!" I broke off, as the thought occurred to me.

"Tush! Runaway marriages are as good as others for what I see," avowed Mrs. Penn, with careless creed. "I question if Miss Chandos even knows of the blow that fell on them. I tell you, child, it was a fearful one. It killed old Sir Thomas; it must be slowly killing Lady Chandos. Do you not observe how they seclude themselves from the world?"

"They might have plenty of visitors if they chose."

"They *don't* have them. Any one in the secret would wonder if they did. Looking back, there's the disgrace that has fallen; looking forward, there's the terrible blow that has yet to fall."

"What is the nature of the disgrace?—what is the blow?"

Mrs. Penn shook her head resolutely. "I am unable to tell you, for two reasons. It is not my place to reveal private troubles of the family sheltering me; and its details would not be meet for a young lady's ears. Ill doings generally leave their consequences behind them —as they have here. Harry Chandos——"

"There is no ill-doing attaching to *him*," I interrupted, a great deal too eagerly.

A smile of derision parted the lips of Mrs. Penn. I saw that it must be one of two things —Harry Chandos was not a good man, or else Mrs. Penn disliked him.

"You don't know," she said. "And if you did, Harry Chandos can be nothing to you."

Her light eyes were turned on me with a searching look, and my cheeks went into a red heat. Mrs. Penn gathered her conclusions.

"Child," she impressively said, "if you are acquiring any liking for Harry Chandos, *dis-*acquire it. Put the thought of him far from you. That he may be a pleasant man in intercourse, I grant; but he must not become too pleasant to

you, or to any other woman. Never waste your heart on a man who cannot marry."

"Cannot *he* marry?"

"No. But I am saying more than I ought," she suddenly added. "We get led on unconsciously in talking, and one word brings out another."

I could have boxed her ears in my vexation. Never, never had the idea of marrying Mr. Chandos crossed my mind; no, not in the wildest dream of dreams. I was a poor dependent governess; he was the presumptive heir to Sir Thomas Chandos.

"To return to what I was saying of Lady Chandos," resumed Mrs. Penn. "Rely upon it, I am right: that she has been suddenly afflicted with insanity. There is no other way of accounting for the mystery attaching to that west wing."

I sat down to think when she left me. To think. Could it possibly be true, her theory?—were there sufficient apparent grounds for it? My poor brain—bewildered with the strange events passing around on the surface or beneath

the surface, this new supposition one of the strangest—was unable to decide.

Had somebody come in to say I'd had a fortune left me, I could not have been more surprised than when Hill appeared with a gracious face. Lady Chandos's carriage was going into Marden on an errand—would I like the drive there and back? It might be a change for me.

“ You dear good Hill !” I cried, in my delight. “ I'll never call you cross again.”

“ Then just please to put your things on at once, and leave off talking nonsense, Miss Hereford,” was Hill's reproof.

Again, as before, it was a lovely day, and altogether the greatest treat they could have given me. I liked the drive, and I liked the state it was taken in. A magnificent carriage and horses, powdered servants, and one pretty girl seated inside. Which was ME !

It was a good opportunity to inquire after my lost handkerchief, and I told James to stop at Mrs. Howard's. Accordingly the carriage drew up there the first thing. But the answer was

not satisfactory. Mrs. Howard was gone. "On the Continent," they believed.

"When will she be back?" I asked, leaning from the carriage to speak.

The servant girl, rather a dirty one and slipshod, did not know. Not at all, she thought. Mrs. Howard had left for good.

"But does Mrs. Howard not live here? Is not this her house?"

"No, ma'am. She lodged here for a little while; that was all."

I don't know why the information struck on my mind as curious, but it did so. Why should she have been there one day, as it were, and be gone the next? It might be all right, however, and I fanciful. Mrs. Penn had said—Mrs. Howard herself had said—she was going to visit her daughter in Brussels. Only I had thought she lived in that house at Marden.

That evening I found I had to dine alone. Mr. Chandos was rather poorly, not able to eat any dinner, Hickens said. How solitary it was to me, nobody knows.

Afterwards, when I was sitting at the window

in the dusk, he came down stairs. He had been in the west wing nearly all day. Opening his desk, he took out a bundle of letters: which appeared to be what he had come for.

“ You must feel lonely, Miss Hereford ?”

“ A little, sir.”

“ That ‘ sir !’ ” he said, with a smile. “ I am sorry not to be able to be down here with you. When I get better, we will have our pleasant times again.”

I was standing up by the table. He held out his hand to shake mine. Thin and shadowy he always looked, but his face wore a gray hue in the dusk of the room.

“ I fear you are very ill, sir. Suppose it should be the fever ?”

“ It is not the fever.”

“ But how can you tell it is not ?”

“ Do not be alarmed. It is nothing but—but what I have had before. Good night, and take care of yourself.”

His tone was strangely sad, his spirits were evidently depressed, and a foreboding of ill fell upon me. It was not lessened when I heard

that a bed was made up for him in the west wing, that Lady Chandos and Hill might be within call in the night in case of need.

Therefore, when consternation broke over the house next morning, I was half prepared for it. Mr. Chandos was alarmingly ill, and a telegraphic express had gone up at dawn for a London physician.

It was so sudden, so unexpected, that none of the household seemed able to comprehend it. As to Hill, she bustled about like one demented. A large table was placed at the west-wing door, and things likely to be wanted in the sick-room were carried up and put there, ready to her hand.

The physician, a Dr. Amos, arrived in the afternoon, the carriage having been sent to await him at the Hetton terminus. A slight-made man, dressed in black, with a Roman nose, and glasses resting on it. Hickens marshalled him to the door of the west wing, where Hill received him.

He stayed a long while; but they said he was taking refreshments as well as seeing his patient.

The servants all liked Mr. Chandos, and they stood peeping in doorways, anxious for the doctor to come out. Hill came down and caught them, a jug in hand.

“Hill, do wait a moment and tell me!” I cried, as they flew away. “Does he find Mr. Chandos dangerously ill?”

“There’s a change for the better,” she answered. “Mr. Chandos will be about again to-morrow or next day. For goodness sake don’t keep me with questions now, Miss Hereford!”

Not I. I did not care to keep her after that good news; and I ran away as light as a bird.

The carriage drew up to the portico, and Dr. Amos came down to it attended by Hickens and Hill. After he passed the parlour-door, I looked out of it, and saw Mr. Dexter come up. He had heard the news of Mr. Chandos’s illness, and had come to inquire after him. Seeing the gentleman, who carried physician in his every look, about to step into the carriage, Mr. Dexter had no difficulty in divining who he was. Raising his hat, he accosted him.

“ I hope, sir, you have not found Mr. Harry Chandos seriously ill ?”

“ Mr. Harry Chandos is very ill indeed !—very ill !” replied Dr. Amos, who appeared to be a pleasant man. “ I fear there are but faint hopes of him.”

“ Good heavens !” cried the thunderstruck agent when he was able to speak. “ But faint hopes ? How awfully sudden it must have come on !”

“ Sudden ? Not at all. It has been coming on for some time. He may have grown rapidly worse, if you mean that. In saying but faint hopes, I mean, of course, of his eventual recovery. He’ll not be quite laid by yet.”

Dr. Amos entered the carriage with the last words, and it drove away, leaving his hearers to digest them ; leaving me, I know, with a mist before my eyes and pulses that had ceased to beat. Hill’s sharp tones broke the silence, bearing harshly upon Mr. Dexter.

“ What on earth need *you* have interfered for ? Can’t a doctor come and go from a place but he

must be smothered with questions? If you have got anything to ask, you can ask me."

"Why, Mrs. Hill, what do you mean?" remonstrated the agent. "I intended no harm, and I have done no harm. But what a pitiable thing about Mr. Chandos!"

"Doctors are not oracles always," snapped Hill. "My opinion's as good as his, and I know Mr. Chandos *will* get better: there's every chance that he'll be about to-morrow. The bad symptoms seem to be going off as sudden as they came on."

"Hill," I whispered, laying hold of her gown as she was flouncing past me, "you say he may be about to-morrow; but will he get well eventually?"

"That's another affair," answered Hill.

"Dr. Amos said it had been coming on a long while," I pursued, detaining her still. "What complaint is it?"

"It's just a complaint that you had better not ask about, for your curiosity can't be satisfied, Miss Hereford," was Hill's response, as she broke away.

Broke away, leaving me. In my dreadful uncertainty, I went up to Hickens, who was standing still, looking so sad, and asked him to tell me what was the matter with Mr. Chandos.

“I don’t know any more than you, miss. Mr. Chandos has had a vast deal of grief and trouble, and it may be telling upon him. He has looked ill of late.”

No comfort anywhere—no comfort. How I got through the day I don’t know. It seemed as if I had received my death-knell, instead of he his.

Hill’s opinion, in one respect, proved to be a correct one, for the next day Mr. Chandos appeared to the household. He came down about twelve o’clock, looking pale and subdued—but so he often looked—and I must say I could not detect much change in him. Starting from my seat in the oak-parlour, as he entered it, I went up to him in the impulse of the moment. He took both my hands.

“Glad to see me again?”

“Yes, I am glad,” I whispered, calming down my excitement, and swallowing the intrusive

tears that had risen. "Mr. Chandos, are you so very ill?"

"Who has been telling you that I am?" he inquired, walking to an arm-chair by help of my shoulder, for his ankle was weak yet, but not releasing me when he had sat down in it.

"I heard Dr. Amos say so. He said——"

"What did he say? Why do you stop?"

I could not answer. I could not disclose the opinion I had heard.

"I suppose you were within hearing when the doctor said he had but faint hopes of me?"

"Yes, I was. But, Mr. Chandos, who could have told you that Dr. Amos said it?"

"I was told," he smiled. "All are not so cautious as you, my little maid."

"But I hope it is not true. I hope you will get well."

"Would it give you any concern if I did not?"

My face flushed as I stood before him. Instead of answering, I bent it like a culprit—like a simpleton.

"I may cheat the doctors yet," he said, cheerfully.

“Have you been ill long?”

“I have not been quite well. Anxiety of mind sometimes takes its revenge upon the body.”

He moved away to his desk as he spoke, which stood on a side-table. It was quite evident he did not wish to pursue the topic. What could I do but let it drop? Taking up my work, I carried it to the window, while he stood rummaging the desk, evidently searching for something. Every individual thing was at length turned out of it and put back again.

“Well, it’s very strange!”

“What is it, sir?” That sir! as he would say. But I felt too shy, in my new and all-conscious feeling for him, to discard it entirely.

He had missed his note-book. One he was in the habit of using for any purpose; as a sort of diary, and also to enter business matters. That he had locked it up in his desk when he last wrote in it, two days ago, he felt absolutely certain.

“Have you left your keys about, sir?”

“I don’t know. I generally put them in my

pocket. But if I did leave them about, nobody would use them. Our servants are honest."

The book, however, could not be found. Mr. Chandos looked for it, I looked, the servants looked. He said in a joking sort of manner that some sleight-of-hand must have been at work; and sat down to write a letter. I saw its address; London, Henry Amos, M.D.

While making tea for Mr. Chandos in the evening, a discussion arose about the date of Emily's last letter, and I ran to my room to get it. Just within the door I encountered Lizzy Dene, darting out with a haste that nearly knocked me down.

"What did you want in my room, Lizzy?"

She murmured some incoherent answer about taking the housemaid's place that evening. A lame excuse. All work connected with the chambers had to be done by daylight; it was a rule of the house. I had had doubts, vague and indefinable, of Lizzy Dene for some days—that the girl was not altogether what she seemed. She looked red and confused now.

Emily's letter was not to be found. And yet

I knew that I had tied it up with two or three others and left the packet in a certain compartment of my smaller trunk. Both boxes looked as though they had been searched over, for the things were not as I placed them. But I missed nothing, except the letters. Lizzy was in the gallery now, peering out at the window close by ; I called to her to come in, and bade her shut the door.

“ Boxes opened ! Letters gone !” she retorted in a passionate tone—though I had only mentioned the fact. “ I have never laid a finger on anything belonging to you, miss. It’s come to a pretty pass if I am to be suspected of that.”

“ Will you tell me what you were doing in my room, Lizzy ?”

“ No I won’t.” Doggedly.

“ I insist upon knowing : or I shall call Mrs. Hill.”

“ Well then, I *will* tell ; I can’t be hung for it,” she returned, with sudden resolution. “ I came into your room, miss, to look for something in the grounds that I thought might come there.”

“ The ghost ?” I said, incautiously.

“So *you* know of it, miss!” was her answer. “Yes; it is walking again: and I’m veering round to their way of thought. Mrs. Hill has locked up the turret, so that look-out is barred to us.”

She pulled open the door with a jerk, and departed. The draught of air blew out my frail wax-taper, and I went to the window: Lizzy had left the curtains and shutters open. I had no fear; it never occurred to me that there could be anything to see. But superstition is catching, and—what did my eyes rest upon?

In the old spot, hovering about the entrance to the pine-walk, was a man’s shadowy figure; the one I had been told to believe was looked upon as the ghost of Sir Thomas Chandos.

These things can be laughed at in the open day, in the broad sunshine. We are ready then to brave ghosts, to acknowledge them to be myths of the fancy, as indisputably as we know the bogies of children to be puppets dressed up to frighten them; but all alone in the darkness the case is different. I was by myself on that vast floor; Lizzy Dene had gone down, the wing-

doors were shut, silence reigned. Once more terror got the better of me, the pacing figure was all too shadowy, and down stairs I flew, crossed the lighted hall, and burst into the oak-parlour to Mr. Chandos.

“Have you been waiting to re-write the letter?” he asked. “Oblivious that your tea stood here, getting cold!”

I could make no answer just yet, but sank into my seat with a white face.

“You look as though you had seen a ghost,” he jestingly said.

And then I burst into tears, just for a moment; the effect no doubt of nervous excitement. Mr. Chandos rose at once, his manner changing to one of tender kindness.

“Has anything alarmed you?”

“I cannot find Madame de Mellissie’s letter,” was all I answered, feeling vexed with myself.

“But that is not the cause of *this*. Something has frightened you. Come, Miss Hereford; I must know what it is,” he concluded, with that quiet command of manner so few resist.

I did not: perhaps did not care to: and told

him briefly what had occurred. Not mentioning suspicions of *Lizzy Dene* or what she said; but simply that the woman had opened the door too hastily, thereby putting my candle out—and then on to what I had seen.

“It must have been one of the gardeners,” he quietly observed. “Why should that have alarmed you?”

That the gardeners never remained in the gardens after twilight, obeying the strict orders of the house, I knew. “Not a gardener,” I answered, “but a ghost.” And, taking courage, I told him all I had heard—that a ghost was said to walk nightly in the grounds.

“Whose ghost?” he asked, with angry sharpness.

“Your late father’s, sir; Sir Thomas Chandos.”

He turned quickly to the mantel-piece, put his elbow on it, and stood there with his back to me. But that his face had looked so troubled, I might have thought he did it to indulge in a quiet laugh.

“Miss Hereford, you cannot seriously believe in such nonsense!”

“No, indeed ; not in collected moments ; but I was left alone in the dark, and the surprise at seeing some one changed to fright.”

“May I inquire from whom you heard this fine tale ?”

“From Mrs. Penn first. But the women-servants talk of it. Lizzy Dene confessed she had gone up now to watch for it.”

He turned round quickly. “*What* do you say ? Lizzy Dene went up to watch for it ?”

“I was not pleased at finding Lizzy in my room ; she has no business to call her there, and I insisted upon knowing what took her to it. At first she would not say, but presently confessed : she had gone to watch for the ghost.”

If ever a man’s countenance betrayed a sickly dread, Mr. Chandos’s did then. He went to the door, hesitated, and came back again, as if scarcely knowing what to be about.

“And she saw it ?—saw some one walking there ? She—and you ?”

“I don’t think she did ; I saw it after she had gone. Oh, Mr. Chandos ; I can see you are angry with me ! I am very sorry ; I——”

“Angry? no,” he interrupted in a gentle tone. “I only think how foolish you must be to listen to anything of the sort. I wish I could have shielded you from this alarm! I wish you had not come just now to Chandos!”

He rang the bell; a loud peal; and desired that Hill should be sent to him. I had never seen his face so stern as when he turned it upon her.

“Can you not contrive to keep the women-servants to their proper occupations, Hill? I hear they are going about the house looking after ghosts.”

“Sir! Mr. Harry!”

“Miss Hereford went to her room just now and found Lizzy Dene at its window. The woman said she was watching for the ghost.”

Hill’s face presented a picture. She stood more like a petrifaction than a living woman. Mr. Chandos recalled her to herself.

“Hill!” was all he said.

“I’ll see about it, sir. I’ll give that Lizzy Dene a word of a sort.”

“I think you had better give her no ‘word’

at all, in the sense you indicate," returned Mr. Chandos. "Keep the women to their duties below at night, and say nothing. *Let the ghost die out, Hill.*"

"Very well, sir."

"As I dare say it will do, quietly enough. Sit with them yourself, if necessary. And—Hill—there's no necessity to mention anything of this to Lady Chandos."

"But—Mr. Harry——"

"Yes, yes; I know what you would say," he interrupted; "leave that to me."

He went limping out at the hall-door as he spoke. Hill disappeared in the direction of the kitchens, muttering angrily.

"That beast of a Lizzy! If she should get spreading this among the out-door men! I always said that girl brought no good to Chandos."

CHAPTER X.

LIZZY DENE.

“For my heart was hot and restless;
And my life was full of care;
And the burden laid upon me
Seemed greater than I could bear.”

SEATED back in the shade, where the sunlight of the afternoon did not fall upon him, I saw him lift his hands at the last line, with a gesture half of despair, half of prayer, and then lay them on his pale face. Whatever his burden might be, it was a heavy one. It was he who had asked me to sing—Mr. Chandos; for the first time since I was in the house. Not much of a singer at the best, I never ventured on any but the most simple songs: and, of modern ones, “The Bridge,” set to music by Miss Lindsay, is the sweetest.

“But now it has fallen from me;
It is buried in the sea;
And only the sorrow of others
Throws its shadow over me.”

Rather boisterously the door was opened, and Mrs. Penn came in. Her hair was decidedly of a more glowing red than usual; but her light green gown of damask silk, her point-lace lap-pets thrown behind, her gold ornaments, ay, and herself, were altogether handsome. Mr. Chandos rose.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said, "for entering so unceremoniously. Hearing the piano, I thought Miss Hercford was alone."

I turned round on the music-stool and sat facing the room. Mr. Chandos handed her a chair.

"Thank you," she said, hesitating to take it. "Mrs. Chandos is in the west wing: but perhaps I shall be intruding if I remain?"

"Not at all," replied Mr. Chandos. "Miss Hereford may be glad of your company. I am going to the west wing myself."

"Have you found your manuscript, Mr. Chandos?"

"What manuscript?"

She paused a moment. "I heard yesterday you had lost one. When Emma came in about

her housemaid's duties last evening, she mentioned it."

It may as well be said, *en passant*, that Emma was housemaid to the east wing; Harriet to the chambers on the first floor generally, mine included; Lizzy Dene to the west wing: but it would frequently be the pleasure of Lady Chandos that Lizzie did not enter her apartments for days together, only Hill.

"It was a memorandum-book; not a manuscript," said Mr. Chandos.

"Oh; I understood her to say a manuscript."

"I have not found it," he continued. "Fortunately the contents are of little consequence. They consist chiefly of notes relative to the every-day business of the estate, and a few private items concerning myself. Some things are entered in hieroglyphics of my own," he continued, with a half laugh, "and I'll defy the thief to make them out, however clever he may be. The singular thing is, how it could have disappeared from my locked desk."

"You must have left your keys out," she quickly said.

“That is more than likely. Having honest people about me at Chandos, I have not been over-particular.”

“It is a bad practice to leave keys where they may be picked up and used; it gives opportunities that otherwise might never have been seized upon,” observed Mrs. Penn, in a dreamy tone.

“Not a bit of it, madam. Unless dishonest people are at hand to take advantage of the opportunities.”

“Then how do you think your book can have gone, Mr. Chandos?”

“Well, I cannot think. I am content to leave the elucidation to time.”

Mrs. Penn looked at him: she seemed to be hesitating over something. It was so palpable that Mr. Chandos noticed it.

“What is it?” he asked.

“I think I will speak,” she said, with sudden decision. “Though indeed I do not like to do so, Mr. Chandos: and I certainly should not, but for hearing of this loss of yours. I have had a small loss too.”

Mr. Chandos sat down ; he had been standing since she came in ; and waited for her to continue.

“ It is not of much value ; but—as you say by your book—it is the fact of its having gone that troubles me. Only a bit of what we call Honiton lace, about three yards of it, two inches in width. That it was safe in my work-box yesterday morning I know. This morning it was no longer there.”

“ Was the work-box locked ?”

“ It was. I had left it in the library, locked. My keys were in a drawer of my bedroom, where I keep them, for they are heavy, and weigh down my dress pockets. Curious to say, upon looking for my keys this morning, I found them not in the usual drawer, but in the fellow-drawer beside it. Whoever had taken them out forgot which was the right drawer and put them back in the wrong one.”

“ And you missed the lace ?”

“ Yes. It happened that I was going to use it to trim some sleeves : but for that I might not have missed it for weeks. It was in the bottom

of the work-box, lying a-top of some other things: as soon as I lifted the upper tray I saw it was gone. Of course I searched the box over, but without result."

"Have you spoken to the servants?"

"I have not said much, lest they should think I accused them. What I said was that I had lost or mislaid some lace; and described it. They appear to be quite innocent. Still, the lace could not go without hands."

"I don't like this," observed Mr. Chandos after a pause.

"It is not the loss in itself—as I say: it is the feeling of insecurity it leaves," returned Mrs. Penn. "One cannot be sure that other things will not follow. But I must not detain you longer," she added, rising. "I hope, Mr. Chandos, you will not think I have been wrong or unkind to mention this."

"I think you have done quite right, Mrs. Penn," he warmly replied, as he opened the door for her. "If we really have a thief in the house, the sooner we are upon our guard the better. Take greater care of your keys for the present.

As to the lace, Mrs. Chandos will make it good to you——”

“Sir! Mr. Chandos!” she interrupted, rather fiercely. “Oh, pray don’t talk in that way; I shall be vexed to have mentioned it. The loss is nothing.”

She left the room. Not a word had I spoken all the while; not a syllable as to my own boxes having been visited. I did not care to throw any accusation upon Lizzy Dene. Besides, the matter seemed to present contradiction to my mind: as I found by the next words it was doing to that of Mr. Chandos.

“I cannot fathom this at all: unless we have two light-fingered people in the house. Mrs. Penn’s lace must have been cribbed by one of the maids, I fear; but it is hardly likely she’d take a memorandum-book. Where would be the use of it to any one of them? There were things of value in my desk, not touched: a gold paper-knife; a large gold seal; and some loose silver. Well, we must wait; and meanwhile take care of our keys,” he concluded as he left the parlour.

I finished my interrupted song in a low voice, sang another or two, and then went up to my room. Mrs. Penn was standing at the library-door.

“Has Mr. Chandos gone into the west wing, do you know, Miss Hereford?”

“I think so. He quitted the parlour almost as soon as you did.”

“I am sorry to have missed him. I don’t know what he’ll think of me. Did you notice my omission?”

“What omission?”

“Never to have asked after his health. I feel ashamed of myself. I have not seen him since the day’s illness he had, when the physician came down to him. I *hate* to be unfeeling,” added Mrs. Penn, in wrath. “But what with seeing him in the oak-parlour when I expected only you were there, and what with the thought of my lace, I completely forgot it.”

“He says he is better. I think he must be very much better from the alarming state they said he was in that day. But he looks ill.”

“*That’s* caused by worry; his ill looks,” said Mrs. Penn. “I should wonder if he could look

well. Look at his figure: it's no better than a skeleton's."

We had been walking together to the end of the library. I don't know whether I have mentioned it before, but every evening, a good hour before dusk, the door of this library was locked for the night by Hill, and the key carried away in her pocket. Mrs. Penn turned to me as we stood together at the window, dropping her voice to a whisper.

“Was there not something *mysterious* about his illness?”

Frankly speaking, I thought there was. But in mind I had connected it in some undefined way with his sleep-walking. I could not say this.

“But that he is so remarkably unlikely a subject for it, a living atom, as may be said, I should think it had been a fit,” she continued. “Did you hear whether the London doctor also saw Lady Chandos?”

“No, I did not. There's nobody to inquire of, except Hill. And you know how much information we should be likely to get from her.”

“ Except *him*,” corrected Mrs. Penn, with emphasis. “ With all his sins, Harry Chandos is a gentleman and would give you an answer.”

I shook my head. It was not my place, a young visitor there on sufferance, to inquire of things they seemed to wish not inquired of: and I said as much to Mrs. Penn.

“ You are too fastidious, Miss Hereford; you are no better than a school-girl. Look here,” she added, turning briskly, “ this is the work-box. I will show you where the lace was.”

It was a large, handsome box; a beautiful box; tortoise-shell inlaid with silver, its fittings of silver and sky-blue velvet; its scissors (save the steel part), its thimble, bodkin, and stiletto of gold.

“ I wonder they did not take *these* as well as the lace.”

“ They might be afraid to do that,” said Mrs. Penn. “ See!” she cried, lifting the tray, “ that’s where it lay. It was a very handsome piece of lace, and I am sorry to lose it.”

The sweeping of a silk dress along the corridor gave token of the approach of Mrs. Chandos. She passed into the east wing, and Mrs. Penn

hastened after her. Standing at the door of the west wing, as if he had attended Mrs. Chandos from it, was Mr. Chandos. He saw us both come out of the library.

Where he had his dinner that day I don't know. Mine was over and the things were taken away before I saw him again. I had been upstairs for a book and met him in the hall. He followed me to the oak-parlour and threw himself into a chair, like one utterly weary.

“ You have not been walking much, have you, Mr. Chandos ? ”

“ Not much ; my foot's too weak yet. I have been taking a turn or two in the pine-walk. And you ? Have you been spirit-gazing again ? ”

I did not answer, except by a shake of the head, and he sat for a long while in silence, breaking it at last abruptly.

“ Does Mrs. Penn get looking from the front windows, after that—that sight—that you professed to see the night before last ? ”

“ I think she would like to do so : but there's no opportunity. The rooms in the east wing do not look to the front, you know.”

“Ah, I see you and she get talking of this together.”

“The talking has been very little, and of her seeking, not mine. I would rather she never spoke to me at all of it: it embarrasses me.”

“Why does it embarrass you?”

“I—I—”

“Well?” he said, looking straight at me.

“I don’t like to say, Mr. Chandos.”

He left his chair and came to the window, where I stood playing with the jessamine. How soft the air was! how sweet the perfume of the flowers in the approaching night!

“Now then. I am come to hear what you mean.”

The tones were persuasive: the face, as it drooped a little, wore a smile of inviting confidence. I bent my head and told him—that I thought what people had seen at midnight and taken for a ghost might be himself walking in his sleep; but that I could not say this to Mrs. Penn. He made no rejoinder whatever. He lifted his head and gazed straight out towards the entrance of the pine-walk.

“ Shall I tell Mrs. Penn that it is not a ghost at all, sir, and set her mind, so far, at rest? I need not give any particulars.”

“ But suppose it is a ghost, Miss Hereford?”

The tones were very sad and serious. My heart beat a little quicker.

“ Did you not assure me you saw it the other night—when I was safe in this very parlour?”

“ Yes; but I thought afterwards it might be what you said—one of the gardeners. Night-light is so deceptive.”

“ Come back for his tools,” added Mr. Chandos. “ Mrs. Penn, however, says it is something else that walks there—my late father’s spirit. Do you think she *believes* it?”

“ Yes. She spoke as if she did believe it: and dreaded it. Shall I tell her she need not?”

“ No,” he sadly said. “ I cannot unfortunately ask you to do that.”

What did the speech mean? Did it really bear the intimation that he could not in truth deny it? Something like a tremor, with that dark and weird pine-walk within sight, crept over me. Mr. Chandos leaned from the window,

plucked a white rose, and put it into my hand.

“There,” he said, “that’s better than talking of ghosts. And, Miss Hereford—keep your curtains above closed after dusk: I don’t like to be watched when I go out there.”

He rang the bell for lights and tea. Ah, that rose, that rose! Does anybody, reading this, remember receiving one from a beloved hand? Had it been a flower of Paradise it could not have borne for me a greater charm. The skies were brighter, the coming night was sweeter, the whole atmosphere seemed impregnated with a bliss, not of this world. My heart was wild with happiness; the rose was worth more than Golconda’s costliest diamonds. I have it still. I shall keep it for ever.

“And now for a cup of tea, if you’ll give me one, Miss Hereford.”

I turned from the window, the rose held carelessly in my fingers, and put it down, as of no moment, beside the tray. Afterwards he stayed talking to me a little while, and then rose to leave for the evening.

“ I wish I could stay longer ; it is very lonely for you,” he said, as he shook hands. “ But my mother feels lonely too ; and so—I must divide myself as I best may.”

“ Is not Lady Chandos better ?” I asked, interrupting his light laugh.

“ Some days she is. Not much on the whole.”

“ And you, sir ?”

I suppose I looked at him wistfully, for he put his hand for a moment on my head, and bent his kind face.

“ Don’t be anxious for me. I am sorry you heard what Amos said. I am very much better than I was the day he was here. Good night.”

It was all dreary again ; sunshine had gone out ; and I went up to bed at half-past nine. The first thing I did was to kiss the rose before putting it away : my cheeks burn at confessing it as they burnt then. Kissing the senseless rose ! And in the very midst of the sweet folly, my chamber door was knocked at, and Mrs. Penn came in.

“How early you have come up! Dull? Ay, I dare say you do find it dull. But I can’t stay a moment. I want you to do me a favour, Anne Hereford. When Mrs. Chandos shall be a-bed and asleep to-night, let me come to your room.”

“What for?” I exclaimed, in great surprise.

“I want to watch from your windows. I want to see whether it *is* a ghost that is said to haunt the walks at night: or—whether it is anything else. I knew the late Sir Thomas, and should recognise——”

“Hush, Mrs. Penn,” I interrupted. Every impulse my mind possessed prompted me to deny the request utterly; to nip it in the bud. “It is what I cannot do. I might get very much frightened myself; but it is not that; it is that I am a visitor in the family, and would not pry into an affair that must no doubt be one of pain and annoyance to them. Don’t you perceive that it would be dishonourable? I keep my curtains closed at night, you see; and no persuasion would induce me to allow them to be opened.”

“You are a foolish girl,” she said, with good humour. “Hill locks up the other rooms at

dusk : and if she did not, I should be too great a coward to watch alone in them. A love of the marvellous was born with me ; I may say a terror of it ; and my early training served to increase this. As a child I was allowed to read ghost-stories ; my nurse used to tell them in my hearing to her companions ; of course it could but bear fruit. I think it perfectly wicked to allow such tales to penetrate to the impressionable imaginations of young children ; they never wholly recover it.”

“ But you cannot seriously believe in ghosts, Mrs. Penn !”

“ I should be ashamed to avow that I do believe in them. And yet the subject bears for me both a terror and a charm : nay, a strange fascination.”

That she spoke the truth now was evident ; though I could not think she always did. I stood waiting for her to go.

“ And so you will not let me come, Miss Hereford ! Well, perhaps you are right : it never occurred to me that the family might feel annoyed at it. Good night.”

But I did not trust her: she might steal in while I slept: and I turned the key of my door inside for the first time since I was at Chandos.

The next day was a gloomy one. Not as to weather; that was bright enough; but for me. Mr. Chandos was away. Gone out somewhere by rail, very far; and would not be back until night.

“Is he well enough to bear the fatigue, Hickens?” I could not help asking the butler as he stood by me at breakfast.

“Well, miss, I should say he is *not* well enough. Hill says it is some pressing business for my lady that he has gone upon; and Mr. Harry is one to go through with any duty, let him be well or ill; ay, though he died for it.”

Idling away the morning desultorily, I got through an hour or two. Was this new feeling making me worthless? Half ashamed of myself as the question flashed over me, I took out a German book of study, and settled down to it on a bench amid the thickest trees, not far from the entrance gates, and near the privet-walk where I had once met Edwin Barley. While I was read-

ing steadily, a voice began speaking at a little distance, and I recognised it for *his*.

Edwin Barley's. Did he habitually come to the shady walk? The clump of thick shrubs, intervening, hid me from him, and him from me; for some minutes I could do nothing but give way to my fear; and did not dare to stir hand or foot.

Some one was speaking with him; whether man or woman I could not tell, the voice was so faint. And it seemed that while Mr. Barley must have had his face turned to me, and the wind, setting this way, bore his accents with it, the other person must have faced the opposite way, and the voice was lost.

“You are stupid, woman!” were the first distinct words I heard from him, seemingly spoken in sudden petulance. “Where's the use of your telling me this much, if you can't tell more?”

It was a woman, then. Sure and swiftly came the conviction of her identity to me with a force I could not account for. Lizzy Dene.

“It must have been a very serious attack, for a physician to be telegraphed for in that haste,”

resumed Mr. Edwin Barley. "And to be well again now to go out for a whole day by rail!"

A pause. It was occupied by the answer, but of that I could not hear so much as a tone. Mr. Edwin Barley resumed.

"There's a mystery about it all that I can't dive into. There's a mystery altogether about Harry Chandos. That attack upon him in the avenue was a curious thing. And his mother? Is she visible yet?"

Another inaudible answer.

"Well, you must work better, if you work at all. This is your affair, mind; not mine; I did not ask you to bring me news, or to look into letters—what do you say? Not able to look into letters? You can read, I suppose?"

It *is* Lizzy Dene, my conscience whispered me; for a half doubt had been crossing me of Mrs. Penn.

"Oh, I understand; don't get the chance of looking into them?" he went on. "Well—it is your own affair, I repeat; but as you choose to make the offer of looking out for discoveries, I *shall expect you to make* some. Do you hear?"

he continued, in his voice of power. “What? Speak low, for fear of hearers? Nonsense; there’s no one to hear. If you want money for bribery, of course I can furnish you with it, if you undertake to use it legitimately.”

Again a pause. The higher Mr. Edwin Barley raised his voice, the lower the other seemed to speak.

“No, you are wrong; the greatest enemy to your plans would be Harry Chandos; the rest are women. That there’s something to be discovered connected with *him*, and at this present time, I am absolutely certain of. Discovered it shall be,” emphatically pronounced Mr. Edwin Barley. “About his wife?” he suddenly asked.

“All that’s wanted is the clue,” he recommenced, after listening to the answer. “*It is to be had*, I know. They’d not live in this dark, retired manner for nothing; and I have my theory about it. What do you say?—oh, well, yes, if you like; I did not ask you to repeat things of the family to me, you know; you are doing it of your own spontaneous will. How long have you lived in this neighbourhood?”

Strain my ears as I would, I could not catch more than a faint sound of whisper in reply.

“Eh? What?” briskly resumed Mr. Edwin Barley. “The ghost walks again! Sir Thomas Chandos! Give my compliments to it, and ask if it remembers me! You foolish women!” he went on, the scorn in his voice echoing on the air. “A troubled conscience may cause people to ‘walk’ in life; but it never yet brought them back after death. Now don’t—oh, I thought you were going to insist on the ghost. Upon thorns lest you should be missed and called for? Hill looks you all up so sharply? I’ll depart then. Advice? I have none to give.”

I heard his steps walking leisurely away. Stealing swiftly along the bye-paths, I went round to the servants’ entrance, determined to see whether Lizzy Dene was out of doors or not. A miserable gnat had bitten me, affording an excuse; but I should have made one in case of need. The cook stood by her kitchen fire.

“Oh, cook, would you please give me a little warm water? A gnat has just stung my wrist. Perhaps if I bathe it at once, it will not inflame.”

She gave it me immediately, putting the basin on the table underneath the window. Harriet ran and brought a little sponge. At that moment Mrs. Hill came in.

“Where’s Lizzy Dene? Is she not here?”

“No, she’s not here,” was the quick answer of the cook, spoken with irritation. “She’s off again—as she always is. I sent her to get the eggs, for the boy never brought them in this morning, and she has been gone pretty near an hour! It’s a shame.”

“It is not Lizzy’s work, that you should send her,” remarked Mrs. Hill; “but she has no business to stop. Have you hurt your hand, Miss Hereford?”

I told her what it was, and she left the kitchen again, leaving orders for Lizzy Dene to come to her in the linen-room as soon as she entered.

“You need not have told,” remonstrated Harriet to the cook, in an undertone on account of my presence. “Mother Hill finds enough fault with us without being helped to more.”

“I’m not going to put up with Lizzy, then, if you are!” cried out the cook, not caring whe-

ther I was present or not. "Send her but for the least thing, and there she stops. My custard ought to have been made, and set to cool by this time. She gets talking to the out-door men; I know she does. What else can she do?"

"That woman was here again last night," rejoined Harriet, as they stood over the fire.

"I say, who *is* that woman?—coming after Lizzy Dene, as she does! Why shouldn't Lizzy be open about it?"

"I asked her who it was, the other day, but she'd give me no answer," replied Harriet. "You know that weeping ash, off yonder to the right. Well, there they stood with their heads together, last night, Lizzy Dene and the woman. Lizzy's very much altered of late. I can't make her out. At the time of the accident to Mr. Chandos, she was like one out of her mind. I asked her if *she* had frightened the horse. There was always something odd about her."

"There'll be something odder about her yet, if she don't speedily bring them eggs," retorted the cook. "I won't put up with this."

I took my hand out of the water, wrapped a

handkerchief loosely round it, and went out at the back-door, taking my way leisurely round. Truth to say, I was watching for Lizzy Dene.

And I saw her. She came darting down one of the paths, and caught up a basket of eggs that stood behind a tree ; her face was red and flushed, as if she had been walking or talking herself into a heat.

“Lizzy,” I said, confronting her, “they are waiting for the eggs. Where have you been?”

“Don’t stop me, miss, please ; cook’s in a rage as it is, I know,” was all the answer I received ; and the woman bore on to the kitchen.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE PINE-WALK.

REALLY mine was just now a strange life. A young girl—I was only that ; young in experience as well as years—living in that house without any companion except Mr. Chandos. More unrestrained companionship could scarcely have existed between us had we been brother and sister. Our meals were taken together ; he presiding at luncheon and dinner, I at breakfast and tea. The oak-parlour was our common sitting-room ; the groves and glades of Chandos, glowing with the tints of autumn, our frequent walks. It was very pleasant ; too pleasant ; I don't say anything about its prudence.

Later, when I grew more conversant with the ways of the world and its exactions, I wondered that Lady Chandos had not seen its inexpediency.

But that *love* should supervene on either side never crossed her thoughts ; had it been suggested to her, she would have rejected the idea as entirely improbable : I was a school-girl, her son (as she had reason to think) was love-proof. In regard to other considerations, Mr. Chandos was one of those men with whom a young girl would be perfectly safe ; and she knew it.

Three or four days passed on. Mr. Chandos had recovered from his lameness, and went to church with us on Sunday. Our order of going was, as usual, this : he walked by the side of Mrs. Chandos, almost in silence ; I and Mrs. Penn behind. In a pew at right angles with ours sat Mr. Edwin Barley alone ; and his dark stern eyes seemed to be fixed on me from the beginning of the service to the end.

Well from his lameness ; but anything but well as to his health, if looks might be relied upon ; he seemed to grow more shadowy day by day. What his illness was I could not think and might not ask : it certainly seemed on the mind more than the body. A conviction grew gradually upon me that some curious mystery, apart from

the sleep-walking, did attach to Mr. Chandos ; and the words I overheard spoken by Edwin Barley strengthened the impression : “ That there is something to be discovered connected with him, and at this present time, I am absolutely certain of.” What did he allude to ?

Surely it was nothing of disgrace ! As he sat there before me, with his calm pale face and its sweet expression, it was against the dictates of common sense to suppose that ill or wicked antecedents attached to him. No ; I would not believe it, let Madame Penn say what she chose.

It was a lovely autumn morning to begin the week with. The fire burnt briskly in the grate, but the window, near which we sat, was open. Mr. Chandos seemed low and depressed. His moods were changeable : sometimes he would be lively, laughing, quite gay ; as if he put away the inward trouble for a time. During breakfast, which he ate this morning nearly in silence, he took a letter from his pocket and glanced down its contents, heaving an involuntary sigh. I recognised it for one that had been delivered the previous morning : the name “ Henry Amos” on

the corner of the envelope proved the writer. I wondered then—I wonder still—*why* people put their names outside the letters they send, as some do.

“ Does he write instructions to you still, Mr. Chandos ?”

“ Who ? Dr. Amos ? Well, yes ; in a measure.”

“ I hope he thinks you are getting better ?”

“ I tell him that I am. You have forgotten the sugar. A small lump, please. Thank you.”

It was ever so. If I did summon up courage to ask about his health he only turned it off. His tea did not want further sweetening more than mine did.

We were sent out that day for a drive in the large open carriage ; Mrs. Chandos, Mrs. Penn, and I. It was the first time we had gone together. Mr. Chandos was away ; attending some county meeting. It was nearly five when we got home. Later, when I had my hair down and dress off, getting ready for dinner, Mrs. Penn came in.

“ Oh, this dreary life at Chandos !” she ex-

claimed, sinking into a chair, without any ceremony, or apology for entering. “ I am not sure that I can continue to put up with it.”

“ Dreary, do you find it ?”

“ It *is* dreary. It is not pleasant or satisfactory. Mrs. Chandos grows colder and more capricious ; and you are not half the companion you might be. It was on the tip of my tongue just now to give her warning. If I *do* give it, I shall be off the next day. I never found a place dull in all my life before.”

“ Something has vexed you perhaps, Mrs. Penn ?”

“ If it has, it’s only a slight vexation. I made haste to write this as soon as we came in”—turning her left hand, in which lay a sealed letter—“ and I find the letters are gone. I thought the man called for them at half-past five.”

“ No ; at five.”

“ So Hickens has just informed me. What few letters I have had to write since I came have been done in the morning. It can’t be helped ; it must wait until to-morrow.”

She put the letter into her bag, shutting it

with a sharp click that told of vexation ; a small morocco bag with a steel clasp and chain ; took her keys from her pocket and locked it.

“ What a pretty thing that is !”

“ This reticule ? Yes, it is pretty ; and very convenient. Have you one ?”

“ Not like that. Mine is an ugly one, made out of a piece of carpet ; I bought it ever so long ago at the fair at Nulle.”

“ Shall you ever go back to Nulle ?”

“ I should be there at this present time, but for a fever that has broken out at Miss Barlieu’s. It is getting better, though ; I heard from Miss Annette on Saturday.”

“ Fever, or not fever, I should say it would be a happy change for you from this dull place.”

Dull ! This ! It was my Elysium. I felt like a guilty girl in my self-consciousness, and the bright colour stole over my face and neck.

“ Allow me to fasten your dress for you.”

I thanked her, but laughingly said that I was accustomed to dress myself. She laughed too ; observed that school-girls generally could help

themselves, having no choice upon the point, and turned to look from the window.

She stood there with her back to me until I was ready to go down, sometimes turning her head to speak. We quitted the room together, and she seemed to have recovered her good temper. I had reached the foot of the stairs when I happened to look up the well of the staircase. There was the face of Mrs. Penn, regarding me with a strange intensity. What did she see in me?

Is this to be a full confession? When my solitary dinner was brought in, and Hickens said his master dined at Warsall, I felt half sick with disappointment. What was I coming to? Something not good, I feared, if I could feel like that; and I sat down after dinner to take myself to task.

Why did I love him? *That* I could not help now; but I could help encouraging it. And yet —*could* I help it, so long as I stayed at Chandos? I foresaw how it would be: a short period of time—it could not be a long one—and Madame de Mellissie would be there and carry me away

with her, and end it. I should get another situation, and never see or hear of Chandos again, or of him. Better go away at once than wait until my heart broke ! better go to the fever, as Mrs. Penn had said !

“ Why ! What’s the matter ?”

He had come up to the open window, riding-whip in hand, having alighted at the gates, and left his horse to the groom. There was no possibility of concealment, and my face was blistered with crying.

“ I felt a little dull, sir.”

“ Dull ! Ah, yes ; of course you do,” he continued as he came into the room, and stood with me at the window. “ I wish I could be more with you, but duties of various kinds call me elsewhere.”

The very thing I had been thinking ought not to be ! My tears were dried, but I felt ashamed of my burning face.

“ Would you please to let me have that money, Mr. Chandos ?”

“ What money ?”

“ Some I asked you for. Enough to take me to Nulle.”

“ You shall have as much money as you please, and welcome. But not to take you to Nulle.”

“ Oh, sir! I must go.”

He paused, looking at me. “ Will you tell me *why* you want to go there, knowing that it might be dangerous?”

“ I have not anywhere else to go to. I don’t suppose the fever would come near me. In all French schools there is, you know, an infirmary apart.”

“ Then your motive is, to quit Chandos. Why?”

I did not speak. Only hung my head.

“ Is it because you find it dull? Are you so unhappy in it?”

“ It is not dull to me; only at moments. But I ought to leave it, because—because the longer I stay, the worse the going away will be.”

But that I was confused and miserable, I should not have told him anything so near the truth. The words slipped from me. There was no reply, and I looked up to find his eyes fixed earnestly upon mine.

“ Only think, sir, for yourself,” I stammered. “ I am but a governess, accustomed to be at work

from morning until night. After this life of ease and idleness, how shall I be able to reconcile myself to labour again?"

"It seems to me that you ought to welcome this interval as a rest. You know best about that, of course. But, whether or not, there is no help for it. Do you think my mother would suffer you to go to the fever?"

"I don't know," I answered, with a catching sob.

"Yes, I think you do know. *I* should not."

"You are too kind to me, Mr. Chandos."

"Am I? Will you repay it by giving me some tea? I am going up to my mother, and shall expect it ready when I come down. Put out, and cool, mind, ready to drink. I am as thirsty as a fish."

I ran to the bell; he meant to forestal me, and his hand fell on mine as it touched the handle. He kept his there while he spoke.

"Can you not be happy at Chandos a little longer?"

"Oh, sir, yes. But it will only make the leaving worse when it comes."

“ Well, that lies in the future.”

Yes, it did lie in it. And in the throbbing bliss his presence brought, I was content to let it lie. Parting could not be worse in the future than it would be now.

The tea had time to get cold, instead of cool, for he stayed a long while in the west wing. He seemed very tired ; did not talk much, and said good-night early.

It must have been getting on for eleven o'clock the next morning. Mr. Chandos had been asking me to sew a button on his glove. “ They are always coming off,” he cried, as he watched my fingers. “ My belief is, they are just pitched on to the gloves, and left there. I have heard Harriet say the same ; she sews them on in general.”

“ Why did you not give her this one ?” I had been laughing, and was in high spirits ; and until the words were out, it did not strike me that it was not quite the right thing for me to say, even in joke.

“ Because I best like you to do it.”

“ There it is, sir. Are there any more ?”

If there were, he had no time to give them

me. A sharp decisive knock at the room door, and Mrs. Penn came in, looking pale and angry.

She has been coming to a rupture with Mrs. Chandos, thought I. But I was wrong.

It appeared, by what she began to say, that she had left unintentionally the small bag, or reticule as she called it, in my room the previous evening, and had not thought of it until just now. Upon sending one of the maids for it, she found it had been opened.

“Mrs. Penn!” I exclaimed.

“It’s quite true,” she rejoined, almost vehemently, as she held out the bag. “Do you remember seeing me put the letter in the bag, Miss Hereford? The letter I was too late to send away?”

“Yes; I saw you put it in and lock the bag.”

“Just so. Well, while I talked with you afterwards, I presume I must have let the bag slip on the window-seat; and forgot it. This morning, not long ago, I missed it, looked everywhere, and it was only by tracing back to when I last remembered to have had it, that I thought of your room, and that I might inadvertently

have left it there. I sent Emma to look ; and when she brought me the bag, I found it had been opened."

"Opened!" I repeated.

"Opened," she fiercely affirmed. And then, perhaps our very calmness recalling her to herself, she went on in a quiet tone.

"I am sure you will make allowance for me if I appear a little excited. I do not seek to cast suspicion upon any one : but I cannot deny that I am both annoyed and angry. You would be so yourself, Mr. Chandos, did such a thing happen to you," she added, suddenly turning to him.

"Take a seat, and explain to me what it is that has happened," replied Mr. Chandos, handing her a chair. "I scarcely comprehend."

"Thank you, no," she said, rejecting the seat. "I cannot stay to sit down, I must return to Mrs. Chandos : it was she who recommended me to come and speak to Miss Hereford. Upon Emma's bringing me the reticule I unlocked it, suspecting nothing, and ——"

"I thought you said it had been opened, Mrs. Penn?"

“ It had been opened. You shall hear. The first thing I saw was my letter, and the red seal looked cracked across. I thought perhaps the bag had fallen fiercely to the ground ; but upon my looking at it more attentively I saw it had been opened. See.”

She put the envelope into Mr. Chandos’s hand for examination. It had been opened with a pen-knife, cut underneath, and afterwards fastened down with gum. Of this there was no doubt ; part of the letter had also been cut.

“ This is very extraordinary,” said Mr. Chandos, as he turned the envelope about. It was addressed to London, to a medical man.

“ Yes, it *is* extraordinary, sir,” said Mrs. Penn, with some slight temper, which I am sure he considered excusable. I did. “ The note was a private note to the gentleman who has attended me for some years ; I didn’t write it for the perusal of the world. But *that* is not the chief question. There must be false keys in the house.”

“ Did you leave your key in the bag, Mrs. Penn ?”

“ No, sir. I had my keys in my pocket. The

lock has not been hurt, therefore it can only have been opened with a false key."

Remembering my own boxes and Mr. Chandos's desk, I felt no doubt that false keys must be at hand. Mrs. Penn said she had not yet spoken to the servants, and Mr. Chandos nodded approval: he would wish to deal with it himself. For my part I had not seen the bag in my room, except in her possession, and did not notice whether she had carried it away or left it.

She quitted the parlour, taking the bag and note and envelope. Mr. Chandos called Hickens and desired that Emma should be sent to him. The girl arrived in some wonder. But she could tell nothing; except that she found the bag lying on the floor by the window-seat, and carried it at once to Mrs. Penn. Harriet was next questioned. She had seen the bag lying in the window-seat the previous evening, she said, when she put the room to rights after Miss Hereford went down to dinner, and left it there, drawing the curtains before it.

"Did you touch it?" asked Mr. Chandos.

"Yes, sir. I took it up in my hand, and

thought what a pretty thing it was : I had never seen it before."

" Did you open it?"

" Open it ? No, sir, that I did not. I think it was locked, for I saw there was a keyhole : at any rate, it was close shut. I did not keep it in my hands a moment, but put it down where I found it, and drew the curtains."

" Who else went into Miss Hereford's room last evening ?"

" Why, sir, how can I tell ?" returned Harriet, after a pause of surprise. " What I have to do in the room does not take five minutes, and I am not anigh it afterwards. Twenty folks might go in and out without my knowing of it."

That both the girls were innocent there could be no question. Then who was guilty ? In undrawing the curtains that morning I must have pulled the bag off the window-seat, which caused me not to see it. Hill went into a fit of temper when she heard of the affair.

" I don't believe there's one of the maids would do such a thing, Mr. Harry. What should they want with other folks's letters ? And where

would they get gum from to stick them down?"

"There's some gum on my mantel-piece, Hill: I use it with my drawings," I said to her.

"Ah, well, gum or no gum, they'd not cut open letters," was Hill's reply, given with obstinacy.

"There must be false keys in the house, Mr. Chandos," I began, as Hill went out.

"There's something worse than that—a spy," was his answer. "Though the one implies the other."

And I thought I could have put my hand upon her—Lizzy Dene. But it was only a doubt. I was not sure. And, being but a doubt, I did not consider I ought to speak.

Some days elapsed with nothing particular to record, and then some money was missed. Mr. Chandos and I were together as usual in the oak-parlour. Opening his desk, he called out rather sharply, and I looked up from my work.

"So! they have walked into the trap, have they!" he cried, searching here and there in it. "I thought so."

"What is it, Mr. Chandos?" I asked: and he presently turned to me, quitting the table.

“These matters have been puzzling me, Miss Hereford. Is it a petty thief that we have in the house, one to crib lace and such trifles; or is it a spy? I have thought it may be both: such a thing is not beyond the bounds of possibility. A person who took Mrs. Penn’s lace would not be likely to take my memorandum-book: for *that* must have been done to pry into my private affairs, or those of the Chandos family: and a spy, aiming at higher game, would keep clear of petty thefts. The taking of Mrs. Penn’s letter, I mean the breaking its seal, I do not understand: but, before that was done, I marked some money and put it in my desk; two sovereigns and two half-crowns. They are gone.”

“You locked the desk afterwards?”

“Yes. Now I shall act decisively. Mrs. Penn has thought me very quiet over her loss, I dare say, but I have not seen my way at all clear. I do not, truth to say, see it now.”

“In what way, sir?”

“I cannot reconcile the one kind of loss with the other. Unless we have two false inmates among us. I begin to think it is so. Say nothing at all to any one, Miss Hereford.”

He wrote a hasty note, directed it, and sealed it with the Chandos coat-of-arms ; then ordered his own groom, James, into his presence.

“ Saddle one of the horses for yourself, James. When you are ready, come round with him, and I will give you directions.”

The man was soon equipped. He appeared leading the horse. Mr. Chandos went out, and I stood at the open window.

“ Are you quite ready to go ?”

“ Quite, sir.”

“ Mount then.”

The servant did as he was bid, and Mr. Chandos continued, putting the note he had written into his hands.

“ Go straight to Warsall, to the police-station, and deliver this. Do not loiter.”

James touched his hat, then his horse, and cantered off.

Ever since I had seen the police at Mr. Edwin Barley’s, at the time of the death of Philip King, I had felt an invincible dread of them ; they were always associated in my mind with darkness and terror. The gens-d’armes in France had not

tended to reassure me ; with their flashing uniform, their cocked hats, their conspicuous swords, and their fiery horses ; but the police, there, were quite another sort of people, far more harmless than ours. The worst I saw of them was the never-ending warfare they kept up with the servant maids for being late in washing before the doors in a morning. The cook at Miss Barlieu's, Marie, called them old women, setting them at defiance always : but one day they cited her before the tribunal, and she had to pay a fine of five francs.

The police arrived in the afternoon ; two, in plain clothes ; and Mr. Chandos was closeted with them alone. Then we heard—at least, I did—that the servants' pockets were to be examined, and their boxes searched. I was standing in the hall, looking wistful enough no doubt, when Mr. Chandos and his two visitors came forth from the drawing-room.

“ You appear scared,” he stayed to say, smiling in my face. “ Have no fear.”

They were disappearing down the passage that led to the kitchens and thence to the servants'

rooms above, when Mrs. Penn came in with her bonnet on. She gazed after the strangers.

“Those look just like police!” she whispered.
“What have they come for?”

“About these losses, I believe. Mr. Chandos has again lost something from his desk.”

“What — besides the first loss the other day?”

“Yes. He feels very much annoyed: and it is enough to make him feel so.”

“I’d forgive a little bit of pilfering—that is, I would not be too harsh upon the thief,” she remarked. “Pretty lace and such like vanities do bear their attractions. But when it comes to violating letters and private papers, that is essentially another affair. What are the police going to do in it? Do you know?”

“I believe the servants’ boxes and pockets are about to be examined.”

“I should think, then, my lace, at any rate, will come to light,” she laughed, as she tripped up the stairs.

The process of searching seemed to be pretty long. Mr. Chandos was in the oak-parlour, when

one of the officers, who seemed to be superior to the other, came in.

“ Well, sir,” said he, as he took the seat to which Mr. Chandos invited him, “ there’s no trace of any stolen property about the maids or their boxes. One or two of them had got some love-letters: they seemed precious more afraid of my reading them than of finding lace or money,” he added, with a broad smile. “ I just glanced over the epistles, enough to convince myself that there was nothing wrong: but there is no game more formidable to be found.”

Mr. Chandos made no reply. I thought he looked puzzled.

“ We have hitherto placed great trust in our servants,” he observed presently. “ But the disappearance of these things is unaccountable.”

“ There does seem some mystery about it,” returned the policeman. “ You say, sir, that you are sure of the housekeeper.”

“ As sure as I am of myself.”

“ Shall we search the rooms in the front, above here, sir? Thieves have a trick of hiding things, you know.”

“No,” decisively replied Mr. Chandos. “My mother might hear you; I could not risk the annoyance to her in her sick state. Besides, the rooms have been fully searched by the house-keeper.”

“Would you like a watch placed in the house, sir, unknown to the servants?”

“No, no,” said Mr. Chandos. “It——”

The appearance of Mrs. Penn caused the pause. She came in, after knocking quietly at the door. Mr. Chandos rose: the officer rose.

“I beg your pardon for my interruption, Mr. Chandos. Will it not be better that the police”—slightly bowing to the one present—“should come up now? Mrs. Chandos has gone into my lady’s rooms: if they can come up at once, she will be spared the sight.”

“Come up for what?” asked Mr. Chandos.

“I understood our boxes were to be examined.”

She evidently meant her own and mine. Mr. Chandos laughed pleasantly.

“Your boxes? Certainly not, Mrs. Penn. Why, you are the chief sufferer! It would be a

new thing to search places for the articles lost out of them."

But Mrs. Penn pressed it. It was not pleasant, although she had lost a bit of lace: and she thought the boxes should all share alike, excepting those belonging to the Chandos family: it would be more satisfactory to our minds. Mr. Chandos repeated his No, courteously, but somewhat imperatively, and left the room with the officer.

"Did you offer your boxes for their inspection?" she asked of me.

"Of course not. They know quite well I should not be likely to take the things."

"I may say the same of myself. But I cannot help remembering that you and I are the only strangers in the place; and it makes me, for my part, feel uncomfortable. Such a thing never before happened in any house where I have been."

"At any rate, Mrs. Penn, *you* must be exempt from suspicion."

"It is not altogether that. I look at it in this light. These servants are searched: they are proved innocent; at least nothing is found

upon them to imply guilt. They may turn round and say—why don't you search these two strangers?—and talk of injustice. However—of course Mr. Chandos must do as he pleases: he seems sole master here."

"Do not fear that he will suspect either you or me, Mrs. Penn. And Lady Chandos, as I gather, knows nothing of the matter."

The search and the commotion had the effect of delaying dinner. It was late when the men departed, and I got tired of being alone in the oak-parlour. Mr. Chandos had gone out somewhere. Putting a shawl over my shoulders, for the evenings were not so warm as they had been, I went out and walked down the avenue.

All in a minute, as I paced it, it occurred to me that Mr. Chandos might be coming home. Would it look as though I had gone to meet him! Love was making me jealously reticent, and I plunged thoughtlessly into the shady walks opposite, trusting to good luck to take me back to the house. Good luck proved a traitor. It lost my way for me: and when I found it again I was at the far end of the pine-walk.

To my dismay. The superstitions attaching to this gloomy walk flashed into my mind. Outside, it had been a grey twilight; here it was nearly as dark as night: in fact, night had set in. There was nothing for it but to run straight through: to turn back would be worse now: and I should inevitably lose myself again. I was about half way up the walk, flying like the wind, when in turning a corner I ran nearly against Mr. Chandos, who was coming quickly down it.

But, in the first moment I did not recognise him; it was too dark. Fear came over me, my heart beat wildly; and but for catching hold of him I must have screamed.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” I said, loosing him. “I did not know you quite at first.”

“*You* here!” he exclaimed in abrupt astonishment, and (as it sounded to my ear) alarm. “What did you come into this dreary portion of the grounds for, and at this hour? I have already warned you not to do it.”

I told him quite humbly how it was: that I had got into it without knowing, after losing my

way. Humbly, because he seemed to be in anger at my disobedience.

“I had better take you out of it,” he said, drawing my arm within his, without the ceremony of asking leave. “When dusk approaches, you must confine your rambles to the open walk, Miss Hereford.”

“Indeed, yes. This has been a lesson to me. But it seemed quite light outside.”

He went on without another word, walking as though he were walking for a wager; almost dragging me, so swift was his pace. The dark boughs meeting overhead, the late hour, the still atmosphere, imparted altogether a sensation of strange dreariness.

All at once a curious thing occurred. What, I scarcely know to this day. I saw nothing; I heard nothing; but Mr. Chandos apparently did, for he stopped short, and his face became as one living terror. At this portion of the walk there was no outlet on either side; the trees and the low dwarf shrubs around them were too thickly planted. His eyes and ears alike strained

—not that he could see far, for the walk wound in and out—Mr. Chandos stood ; then he suddenly drew me close against those said trees, placed himself before me, and bent my face down upon his breast, so that I could see nothing.

“ You will be safe thus ; I will take care of you,” he whispered, the words trembling as they left his hot lips. “ Hush ! Be still, for the love of Heaven.”

So entirely was I taken by surprise, so great was my alarm, that “ still” I kept, unresistingly ; there as he placed and held me. I heard measured footsteps advance, pass us—they must have touched him—and go on their way. Mr. Chandos’s heart was beating more violently than is common to man, and as the steps went by, he clasped me with almost a painful pressure ; so that to look up, had I been so inclined, was impossible. When the sound of the footsteps had died away, he raised his head, went on a few yards up the walk, and drew me into one of the narrow intersecting paths, holding still my face near to him. His own was deadly white. Then he released my head, just a little.

“Anne, I could not help it. You must forgive me.”

The name, Anne—the first time he had called me by it—sent a whole rush of joy through my veins. What with that, what with the emotion altogether, what with the fright, I burst into tears.

“You are angry with me !”

“Oh, no, not angry. Thank you for sheltering me: I am sure you must have had good cause. I am only frightened.”

“Indeed, I had cause,” he replied, in a passionate sort of wail. “But you are safe now. I wish—I wish I could shelter you through life.”

He must have felt my heart beat at the words; he must; swifter, far, than his had done just now.

“But what was the danger?” I took courage to ask.

“A danger that you may not inquire about. You have escaped it; let that suffice. But you must never encounter the risk again; do you hear, Anne?”

“Only tell me how I am to avoid it.”

“By keeping away from these gloomy walks

at nightfall. I feel as if I could never be thankful enough for having come up when I did."

He had turned into the pine-walk again, my arm within his now, and was striding up it. At the top he released me quite.

"Shall you be afraid to run across the lawn alone?"

"Oh, no ; there's the hall-lamp for company."

"To be sure. One moment yet. I want a promise from you."

He held me before him, looking straight into my eyes, and took my hand between both of his, not in affection, I saw that well enough, but in painful anxiety.

"A promise not to mention what has occurred to any one."

"Trust me, I will not. *Trust* me, Mr. Chandos."

"Yes, I do trust you. Thank you, my dear little friend."

But all the while his face had remained cold and white. Rarely had such terror fallen upon man : its signs were there. He turned back into the walk again, and I ran swiftly across in the

stream of light thrown on the grass by the hall-lamp, and got indoors ; one bewildering query haunting me—did ghosts emit sounds as of footsteps when they walked ?

My dinner was getting cold on the table. Hickens stared at me as I went in, wondering, doubtless, where I had been. Mr. Chandos's place remained unoccupied ; and the things were taken away. I did marvel at his remaining out of doors so long. By and by, Hill came in to get something from the sideboard ; she ran in and out of the rooms at will, without any sort of ceremony. To speak to her was a sort of relief.

“ Hill, don't you think it is very imprudent of Mr. Chandos to be out in the night-air so long, considering that he was ill recently ?”

“ I should if he was in it,” responded Hill, in the short tone she always gave me. “ Mr. Chandos is in the west wing with my lady.”

It had occurred to my mind many times—and I think I was right—that Hill resented the fact of my unfortunate detention at Chandos.

On the following day a new feature was to be added to the mysterious illness of Lady Chandos

—a doctor at length came to see her. He had travelled from a distance, as was understood ; but whether by train, or other conveyance, did not appear. They called him Dr. Laken. He was a short, thin man, getting in years, with dark eyes, and a benevolent, and truthful countenance. His appearance was unexpected—but it seemed more welcome than gold. Mr. Chandos came to him in the oak-parlour, shaking hands warmly.

“ Doctor ! how glad I am to see you ! So you have at last returned !”

“ Ay, safe and sound ; and considerably refreshed by my two months’ change. Where do you think I have been, Mr. Harry ? All the way to the other end of Scotland.”

“ And you were such a stay-at-home !”

“ When I was obliged to be. I’m getting old now, and my son has taken to the patients. Well, and who is it that is in urgent need of me ? Your blooming self ?”

“ My blooming self is in no need of medical aid just now,” replied Mr. Chandos, something constrained in his voice. “ Will you take anything at once, doctor ?”

“ I’ll see my patient first. It is my lady, I suppose?”

Mr. Chandos nodded.

“ Ah,” said the doctor, following him from the parlour, “ I said, you may remember, that the time might come when you’d be glad of me at Chandos. No skill in these remote parts; a set of muffs, all; known to be.”

Mr. Chandos echoed his laugh; and, leading the way to his study, shut himself in with the doctor. Afterwards he took him up to the west wing.

Why should Mr. Chandos have denied that he was ill?—as by implication he certainly did—was the question that I kept asking myself. Later, when he came to the oak-parlour, I asked it of him.

“ One patient is enough in a house,” was all his answer. He had come down from the west wing grave, grave even to sadness.

“ But—to imply that you were well—when you know what the other doctor said!”

“ Hush! Don’t allude to that. It was a painful episode, one that I like to be silent upon.

The—the danger, as I thought it, passed with the day, you know."

"But are you really better?"

"I am well enough, now," he answered, the gloom on his face breaking. "At least I should be if—I mean that I am as well as I can expect to be."

"Oh, Mr. Chandos! I think you are only saying this to satisfy me."

"Anne—I must call you 'Anne'; I did so last night, you know, and I cannot go back to the formality of 'Miss Hereford'—"

"Yes, yes, please call me it," I interrupted all too earnestly.

He touched the tip of my shoulder, looking down with a sad sweet smile into my eyes and my blushing face.

"Anne, whether I am ill or well, you must not make it of moment to you. I wish it might be otherwise."

I felt fit to strike myself. Had I so betrayed my own feelings? The soft blush of love turned to the glowing red of shame, and I could but look down, in hope of hiding it.

“ My little friend! my dear little friend !” he softly whispered, as if to atone for the former words, “ in saying I wish it might be otherwise —and perhaps I owe it to you to say as much— the subject must close. You and I may be the best friends living, Anne ; and that is all I can be to you, or to any one.”

Quitting the parlour rather hastily, he encountered Dr. Laken in the hall, who had just come down from the west wing. Mr. Chandos said something in a low tone ; I presume, by the answer, it was an inquiry as to what he thought of his patient.

“ Emaciated, and as obstinate as——”

Mr. Chandos checked the loud voice ; and the doctor, turning into the parlour, caught sight of me.

“ I never was famous for civility you know, Mr. Harry, but I confess I ought not to abuse Lady Chandos before this young lady. I was going to say ‘ obstinate as a mule.’ Your mother *is* obstinate.”

“ I know it,” replied Mr. Chandos, lifting his eyes to the doctor’s. “ That is one of the

worst features of the case. They are all bad enough."

"And it can't be remedied. Unless—but there might be danger attending that. Besides—well, well, we must do the best we can; it would not answer to try experiments on Lady Chandos."

Up to the word "besides," Dr. Laken seemed to be forgetting that I was in the room; with the recollection he stopped, making the break. Mr. Chandos rang for refreshments to be served, and I gathered up my work to leave them alone.

"I wish you could remain for the night, Dr. Laken."

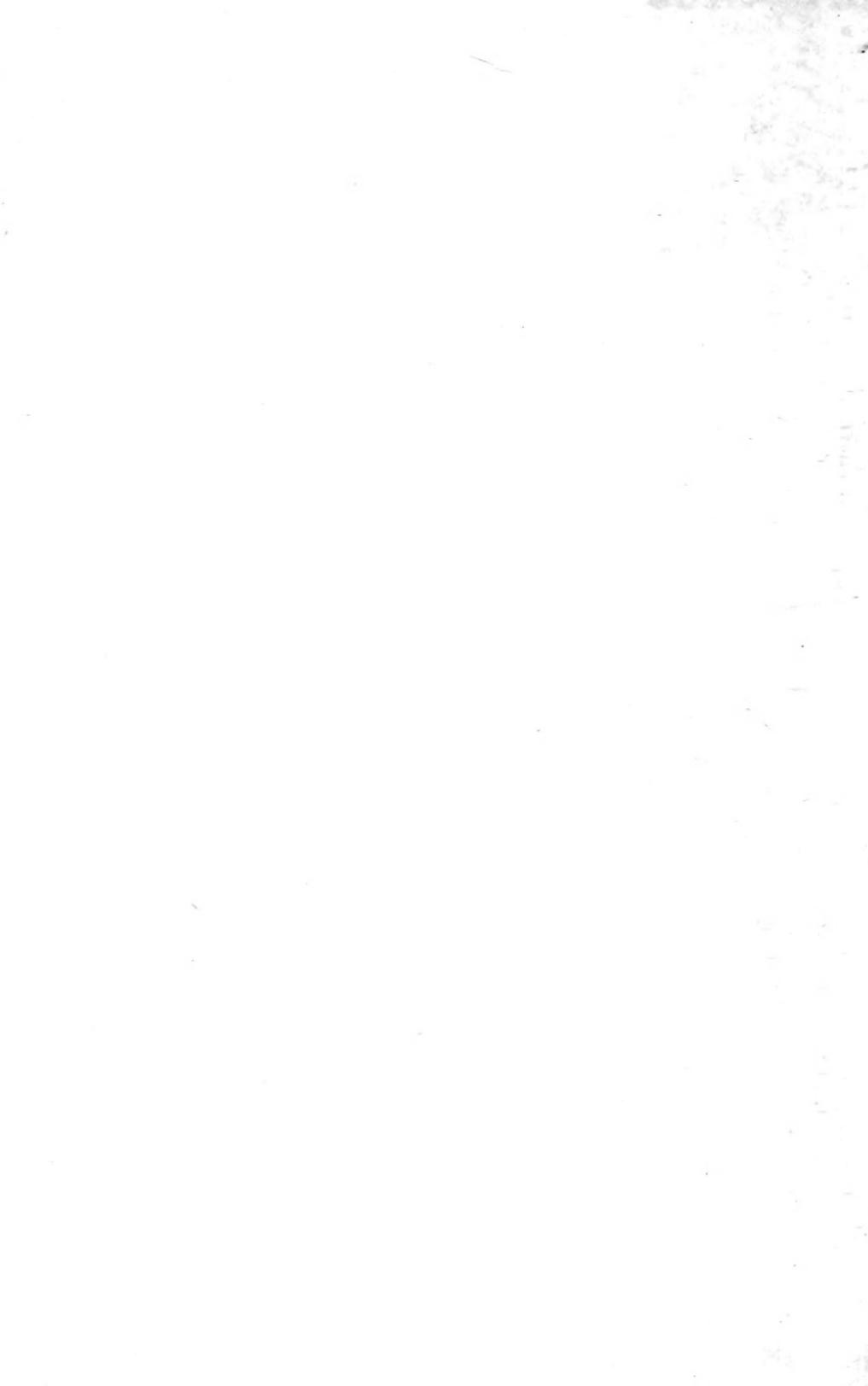
"So do I. But it's of no use wishing it, Mr. Harry. I'll see what I can do towards spending a couple of days here next week."

They were the last words I heard. In half an hour the pony carriage was ordered round, and the doctor went away, Mr. Chandos driving.

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